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# Seeing With Eyes Unclouded: Representations of Creativity in the Works of Hayao Miyazaki

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# **Seeing With Eyes Unclouded**

**Representations of Creativity in the Works of Hayao Miyazaki**

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# Abstract

Though Japanese animation director Hayao Miyazaki is best known for creating imaginative fantasy and adventure features, he has also, on multiple occasions, directly engaged with realistic, contemporary, or historical settings in films that examine everyday human issues and present reflexive musings on the nature of creativity. This study explores how Miyazaki represents creativity in relation to fundamental aspects of the human condition through close analysis of three of these films: *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), *Whisper of the Heart* (1995, Dir. Yoshifumi Kondo, written by Hayao Miyazaki), and *The Wind Rises* (2013). Each of these works explores creativity as a dynamic and multifaceted force, and gives way to larger discussions of how individuals find, define, and maintain their personal voice or talent in a world that is complex, demanding, and imbalanced. This study examines how Miyazaki intertwines creative or artistic expression with the trials of adolescence and the harsh realities of adulthood, while also focusing on the political, social, and philosophical implications of how these works represent the creative spirit.

Several thematic through-lines are traced between the three films, starting with *Kiki's Delivery Service*, which, while not focused on creativity directly, nevertheless draws connections between talent, identity, and self-sufficiency to explore how our passions define and empower us. *Whisper of the Heart* then applies these themes to contemporary Japanese society, and tells its story about an individual finding her voice and place in the world through the specific lens of artistic expression. *The Wind Rises*, finally, explores these ideas on a much more intense and challenging historical scale, set in the years leading up to World War II and telling a fictionalized narrative about the life of Jiro Horikoshi, designer of Japan's deadly Zero Fighter. Exploring creativity and compromise in the real world, the film is also about the dualities of life and art,



and ties together the themes of these three works – as well as the major recurring ideas of all Miyazaki’s films – in a highly emotional conclusion centered around the beauty and melancholy of transience. Taken together, these three films not only illustrate an insightful and inspiring theory of creativity, but illuminate the overall arc of Miyazaki’s career, with each work signifying a major evolution in his thematic development, and, in the case of *Kiki* and *Whisper*, directly anticipating his most successful and acclaimed films.



## Prologue: *To See With Eyes Unclouded*

Charting a path of creative reflexivity in the films of Hayao Miyazaki

*As for the ‘power of fantasy,’ that was my own personal experience. When I was younger I was filled with anxiety and lacked self-confidence, and was no good at expressing myself. The few times I truly felt free were times when, for example, I read [Osamu] Tezuka’s manga, or read books that I had borrowed from someone. Nowadays people say you should face reality and not flinch from it, but I think the power of fantasy is that it provides a space for people to become heroes, even if they lack confidence when trying to face reality. It doesn’t have to be just manga or animation, it could even be myths and stories from much longer ago; I just think that humans have always brought with them stories that make them feel they can cope somehow, that things will turn out all right.*

Hayao Miyazaki, 2001<sup>1</sup>

In Hayao Miyazaki’s 1997 period epic *Princess Mononoke*, the protagonist, Prince Ashitaka, is beset by a mysterious affliction after defending his village from an accursed boar god. The boar, which the village elder reveals had been wounded by a great iron bullet, was infected with the hatred of man, the poison of industrial society turning the once-majestic beast into a rampaging, vengeful monster. In killing the boar, both to protect his people and put the fallen god to rest, Ashitaka has inherited this hatred, its toxicity subsumed into his flesh as a powerful and deadly curse just as it was for the boar. The elder, in revealing the path Ashitaka must now walk, tells

him that there is no way to change his fate – only the opportunity to rise and meet it. Striving to find and rectify the source of this hatred is the only way to abate the curse’s spread. “Calamity has befallen the land of the west,” she explains to him. “Journey there, and see with eyes unclouded. There might be a way to lift the curse.”<sup>2</sup>

It might as well be the mission statement for Miyazaki’s entire career.

There are countless qualities that contribute to Hayao Miyazaki’s status as the world’s greatest living animator, and will continue to bear weight when history remembers him as cinema’s most significant and accomplished director of animated feature films: His intoxicatingly beautiful art style and meticulous attention to detail, with breathtaking, painterly backgrounds and rich, dynamic uses of color (no animator has ever incorporated the unique aesthetics of watercolor so completely into their work); his vibrant and relatable characters, three-dimensional human figures of each gender and all ages who are designed with striking, oftentimes iconic simple power, and animated with rigorous attention to both personality and physicality; and, of course, the incredible worlds these characters populate, realms of both fantasy and reality brought brilliantly to life with what friend and colleague Isao Takahata describes as “an imagination so vivid it verges on a hallucinatory vision.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet the talent that matters most in the creation of Miyazaki’s masterful motion pictures is the one he asks of Prince Ashitaka: the ability ‘to see with eyes unclouded,’ to observe and comment upon our world and its many faults and triumphs with calm clarity and reason. To cut through the noise and chaos of human existence – and, indeed, the empty spectacle and overwrought action of modern commercial cinema – to probe at the emotional and intellectual core of what makes us fallible, what inspires our goodness, and what challenges, amazes, and inspires us in the time we walk this earth. In the realms of live-action and animated filmmaking

alike, Miyazaki is one of the most accomplished purveyors of the human condition, a natural successor to the great line of Japanese directors who also dedicated their careers to exploring universal human issues in culturally or narratively specific stories and settings, and whose work resonates around the world today as a result: Yasujiro Ozu, Mikio Naruse, Akira Kurosawa, Kenji Mizoguchi, Masaki Kobayashi, and many more. Miyazaki differs greatly from these filmmakers in many ways, just as each of them stands out distinctly from one another (in fact, with his calm editing and frequently still, visually dense compositions, Miyazaki's prime stylistic differentiation from these directors may not be his use of the animated medium so much as his employment of fantasy). But he belongs in the lineup just the same, his passionate yet level-headed explorations of the senselessness of war, the processes of grief, the nature of maturity, the power of human relationships, the structure and imperfections of human societies, and, especially, mankind's connection to ecology – few directors have ever given such intense focus to how humans impact and are shaped by the environment – making his films deeply and universally resonant with rich intellectual and emotional power, a quality shared by the great masterworks of Japan's cinematic golden age.

This capacity to tell stories and craft art 'with eyes unclouded' is therefore key to Miyazaki's creative genius. It is also, not coincidentally, a core tenant of his own conception of creative thinking, a topic that has come to the forefront of his work on three separate films, and which always represents a shift or evolution in his perception of human nature and other thematic issues. Differing from Miyazaki's period epics like *Princess Mononoke*, fantasy narratives like *Spirited Away* (2001), or adventure films like *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986), these three films – namely, *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), *Whisper of the Heart* (1995; Dir. Yoshifumi Kondo; written and storyboarded by Miyazaki), and *The Wind Rises* (2013)<sup>4</sup> – feature

realistic settings and grounded human stories; fantasy is not erased entirely, but it is either minimized, as in the case of *Kiki's Delivery Service*, or relocated to internal dimensions, as in *Whisper of the Heart* and *The Wind Rises*, a function of the protagonist's psyche and imagination rather than an exterior reality. These films are of a piece with Miyazaki's other work stylistically (save, in some ways, *Whisper*, which features a slightly different aesthetic due to Kondo's direction) and thematically, exploring the same broad human issues that color the whole of his filmography. Yet the ways in which they are unique – chiefly their intimate reflexivity on the creative process – make them fascinating milestones in his career, and combine to illustrate a theory of creativity that is both profoundly relatable to the artistically-oriented viewer and broadly applicable to many of the most formative and challenging aspects of the human condition.

Reflexivity is, indeed, the element that draws a clear line between these three films. While all of Miyazaki's works are highly personal, informed always by his unique worldview and interests (the constantly recurring motif of flight being most prominent), *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Whisper of the Heart*, and *The Wind Rises* are unique in how they directly engage with the processes of artistry and creation, exploring the major themes of Miyazaki's career through stories and characters who are analogous, in part or in whole, to Miyazaki's identity as an artist, and to his personal beliefs and anxieties on the nature of creativity. Thus, to trace the arc of these three films is to trace the arc of Miyazaki's thematic, intellectual, and even stylistic development, for just as his thoughts on creativity evolve and expand over time – a progression directly fed into these features through their reflexive mode of storytelling – so too does his worldview. As a result, these films, though 'smaller' works when viewed against the totality of his filmography, serve as crucial developmental signposts, the artistic breakthroughs made within them setting the

stage for some of Miyazaki's most successful, influential, and acclaimed works (*Kiki's Delivery Service* is an obvious precursor to *Spirited Away*, for instance, just as *Whisper of the Heart* thematically presages *Princess Mononoke*). In this way, they are arguably three of the most 'significant' films in the Miyazaki canon.

Tracing the arc of these films and arguing for their significance is precisely what this study aims to do. Through close analysis of *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Whisper of the Heart*, and *The Wind Rises*, in addition to substantial engagement with essays, speeches, and interviews by Hayao Miyazaki, this study examines how creativity is represented as a dynamic and ethereal force in his work, one that is intimately tied to how individuals discover and maintain identity amidst the challenges of human society. Attention is given both to how the films operate on their own terms, and to how they build off one another, the relatively simple, formative concepts of creativity presented in *Kiki's Delivery Service* giving way to a more complex perspective on the actualizing power of art in *Whisper of the Heart*, which then becomes a more mature, ethically-oriented conception of how creativity reflects and impacts humanity's many contradictions in *The Wind Rises*. Along the way, the cultural, historical, and political dimensions of the films are considered, always with an eye for how the context in which these characters live shapes their creativity and identity.

This analysis begins with *Kiki's Delivery Service*, which opens the door to this study with a simple, deceptively rich story about finding personal independence by accessing one's talents. The film follows a young witch, Kiki, who, in keeping with long-standing tradition, leaves home at the age of thirteen (with sarcastic black cat Jiji in tow) to spend a year of 'training' out in the world. Her goal is to find a town with no other witches, where she may assert herself into the community and hone her magic by becoming self-sufficient in a new and unfamiliar setting.

Upon arriving in what looks to be a suitable town – Corico, a fictional 1950s European amalgam based primarily on the city of Visby in Sweden – Kiki meets a valuable ally and mentor in the local bakery owner, Osono, and after helping her new friend return a lost item to a customer, realizes she can use her ability to fly to start a delivery service. Yet even as Kiki starts to find success in this new venture, her good-hearted nature and perseverance always allowing her to find triumph when the deliveries present challenges, she is plagued by self-doubt, unable to connect with local children like Tombo – a flight enthusiast who continually tries reaching out to her – and incapable of recognizing or focusing on her many personal strengths. Kiki’s anxiety eventually catches up to her, and she finds her magic dissipating. But with the help of some friends made earlier on a delivery – including Ursula, a teenage artist who helps Kiki understand the enigmatic nature of talent – Kiki starts to regain her confidence, and manages to fly once again in the climax, saving Tombo when the boy’s life is threatened by the crashing of a giant dirigible.

While *Kiki’s Delivery Service* does not necessarily tackle creativity directly – unlike the protagonists of the other films, Kiki is not an ‘artist’ herself, with the painter Ursula serving as film’s primary source of reflexivity – it draws connections between talent and identity to explore not only how our passions define and empower us, but how they can also serve as a limiting force if one focuses on what makes one ‘special’ to the exclusion of all else. The ‘creative spirit’ Kiki forges in the film is a multifaceted energy comprised of much more than just mastery of a talent; it also involves being comfortable in one’s environment, taking strength in one’s relationships with others, and having confidence in one’s abilities and worth. To truly foster a sustainable creative or independent atmosphere, one must strive to see both the world and oneself ‘with eyes unclouded.’ It is the first step on any artistic journey.

*Whisper of the Heart* explores all these themes as well, but is set in contemporary Japan, and tells its story about the individual finding her voice and place in the world through the specific lens of creative expression. The protagonist, Shizuku Tsukishima, is a fourteen-year-old junior high student preparing for her high school entrance exams in Tama, Tokyo. While Shizuku is generally cheerful and enthusiastic about life – especially reading, which she does voraciously – she also feels a sort of restless discomfort, as expressed in the lyric adaptations of John Denver’s “Take Me Home, Country Roads” she writes and shares with her friends, which subvert Denver’s simple tune into voicing disdain for the repressive forces of modern urban society. One day, on a trip to the library, Shizuku finds herself following a mysterious stray cat on a whim, the adventure leading her high up into a suburb on the Tama hills, where she discovers a beautiful antique shop that sparks her nascent creative impulses, and meets the elderly shop owner, Mr. Nishi, who becomes a guide and mentor for her much the same way Osono is for Kiki. Later, after becoming depressed due in part to romantic angst amongst her friends at school, Shizuku returns to the shop, only to discover that a classmate she previously mistrusted, Seiji, is Mr. Nishi’s grandson. The two bond over Seiji’s own creative passion, violinmaking, for which he intends to travel to Italy for an apprenticeship. As their friendship grows, Shizuku finds herself both inspired by and competitive with Seiji’s artistic drive, and decides to test her own talents while Seiji is away by writing a fantasy story. Shizuku puts all her energy into writing, even ignoring her studies in pursuit of this vastly more fulfilling ambition, and upon finishing her story – which Mr. Nishi kindly agrees to read, and praises for its passion and imagination – finds herself able to face the world with a greater sense of confidence and purpose.



Though very lightly plotted, *Whisper of the Heart* is dense with observations and insights about the contemporary adolescent experience, and is particularly perceptive in how it illustrates the ways modern Japanese society, a vast bustle of anonymity, represses the individual, making it supremely difficult to find one's voice, let alone be heard. At the start of the story, Shizuku already possesses many of the tenants of a 'creative spirit' found in *Kiki's Delivery Service*; her struggle lies in accessing this spirit and forging her own identity in a world that was not built for her, and is not designed to encourage or reward an individual walking her own path. The three "Country Roads" variations she writes are crucial to this conflict, signposts on her journey of creative awakening, while the film's second half, in which she gives herself over completely to her artistic passion, demonstrates the actualizing power of creativity. It is the force that gives her a sense of significance in this anonymous modern landscape, and that will allow her to face the challenges of the world going forward with a powerful and assured sense of self.

*The Wind Rises*, which looks to be Miyazaki's final picture after the announcement of his retirement from feature filmmaking in September 2013, builds further still from these ideas, again positioning creativity as both molder and product of identity, but goes deeper and darker in exploring the dualistic nature of artistic expression as it exists in a world of contrasts and contradictions. The film tells the story of Jiro Horikoshi, the aeronautical engineer who designed Japan's infamous and deadly Zero Fighter, the plane used in the attacks on Pearl Harbor and which dominated the Pacific Theater for another six months during World War II. Following a brief prologue set in Jiro's childhood – where his dreams of becoming a pilot are dashed by his poor eyesight, and he chooses instead to pursue engineering – the film is set mainly in the 1920s and 30s, Jiro's arc framed against major historical events such as the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, or the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Jiro's career as a designer at Mitsubishi,

where he rises quickly through the ranks due to his obvious talent before being assigned the project that would become the Zero, is depicted alongside several interior fantasy sequences, where Jiro visualizes his designs, considers the horrors of war, and is guided by a vision of the Italian aircraft engineer Count Giovanni Battista Caproni, who serves for him the same guiding role as Osono or Mr. Nishi. Jiro's professional life, largely drawn from or inspired by history, is contrasted with a wholly fictionalized personal life, inspired by the writings of author Tatsuo Hori, in which he meets and falls in love with Nahoko, a painter ill with tuberculosis. In the film's final third, she chooses to leave the sanitarium to come be with Jiro in the city, and they spend a few brief, happy years together as a married couple while Jiro completes his designs for the Zero. As Jiro's plane is successfully tested, its capability immediately obvious, Nahoko, who knows her life is ending, returns quietly to the sanitarium and passes away, leaving Jiro alone throughout the war, where his Zeros would go on to do terrible things.

One of the most ethically and thematically complex works in Miyazaki's filmography, *The Wind Rises* is his ultimate statement on both creativity and human existence, identifying through Horikoshi's story a core dichotomy at the heart of artistry – that it can be beautiful and inspiring in a many regards, especially the personal, but dark and devastating in others once it is released to the larger world – that he uses to facilitate an exploration into the myriad dualities of human life. Horikoshi's story is the most reflexive narrative in any of Miyazaki's films, the dilemma of the Zero fighter reflecting the director's own well-documented anxiety over working within the heavily commercialized and often exploitative medium of animation, and the subplots about rebuilding after the earthquake or living with tuberculosis serve to further the greatest recurring theme of his career: How can we, as humans, go on living in a positive and productive way when so much of our world is problematic and challenging, often because of our own

actions? The answers Miyazaki comes to, while neither easy nor simple, are nevertheless profound, a message of hope on the beauty and melancholy of transience that allows Miyazaki to find a note of conflicted but meaningful absolution on which to end his career.

In terms of aesthetics, while substantial focus is given in these analyses to the color, composition, technique, and meaning of Miyazaki's imagery – like many of his Japanese filmmaking predecessors, he is an intensely visual storyteller, and his work must be engaged with on that level – one of the implicit arguments of this study is that a great work of animated cinema need not be critically approached too differently, if differently at all, than a live-action narrative feature. There is a tendency in Western criticism and scholarship to put animation aside or consider it only for its commercial implications, while Miyazaki's films prove that there is ample room for textual and thematic analysis of animated features. Just as we identify strongly with great achievements of live-action filmmaking, and frequently base our critical response to a film on our emotional experience relating or reacting to the work, identification with human sensations, experiences, ideas, and movements is a core part of what makes Miyazaki's works – and, indeed, those of his colleagues at Studio Ghibli – resonate so powerfully.

This may come as a foreign concept to the Western reader, because American animation has a history of actively resisting genuine audience identification. Hollywood animation is still largely rooted in the tropes and tenants of the films produced by the Walt Disney Animation Studios, in which fantasy touches or overwhelms every setting or story, comedy intrudes constantly through a stock set of supporting character types, everyday emotions and experiences are undercut or negated entirely through mythical narratives and fairy-tale contrivances (hence the usual connection of the protagonist to royalty, godhood, or other similar 'higher' powers), and male and female characters each have very specific, generally limited roles to play, the

specifics of which depend only on whether or not they are the protagonist (much attention has been giving to the narrative restrictions of women in animation, but it goes both ways; in a female-led animated film, the male ‘lead’ is typically as developed and interesting as drywall, and lazily constructed drywall at that). There are exceptions here and there to these rules – Don Bluth was slightly more willing to let his characters represent ‘normal’ people in the 1980s, for instance, and Pixar made a name for itself in the 2000s breaking many of these rules, before it chose to succumb to them entirely with lesser works like *Cars 2* (2011; Dir. John Lasseter) and *Brave* (2012; Dir. Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman) – and truly magnificent, emotionally impactful films have been made even within many of these long-established boundaries, such as DreamWorks Animation’s *How To Train Your Dragon* (2009; Dir. Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois).

Yet the fact remains that animation in the United States is bound by an easily definable set of generic definitions, and in the recent years of the CGI boom, those boundaries have narrowed even further. A specific type of reference-based humor and pop-culture trend chasing have dominated animated films, art styles have become largely interchangeable – nearly all CG-animated human beings draw from either the rounded designs of *Shrek* (2001; Dir. Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson) or the angular features of *The Incredibles* (2004; Dir. Brad Bird), and all share a smooth, plastic sheen – and female characters have been marginalized even further, kicked almost entirely from the spotlight in favor of male leads (during Pixar’s entire period of critical supremacy, the studio never once featured a female protagonist or employed a female director). Animation theoretically describes a mode of cinematic production, but in the United States, it can accurately be considered a genre unto itself, and as it is a genre perpetuated in aggressive pursuit of commerce, focusing on franchise extension and merchandizing to the

near-total detriment of narrative substance or, indeed, audience identification, its intellectual worth in the Western world is limited.

The Japanese animation industry is also inherently commercial, and it would be impossible to argue otherwise. In fact, Japan's animation industry is much bigger and vastly more productive than America's; at the end of the 1990s, "around 3 to 6 percent of weekly Japanese-made TV programming was animation, approximately 25 to 30 percent of Japanese-made videos released commercially were animation, and about 5 percent of Japanese-made theatrical releases were animation."<sup>5</sup> Even with serious downturns in the anime industry in the 2000s, the amount of Japanese animation produced has only increased in recent years. It is a phenomenally massive industry, one driven just as heavily as in the United States by merchandizing, if not more so – Toshio Suzuki, former President of Studio Ghibli and producer on nearly all Miyazaki's films,<sup>6</sup> claims that Totoro merchandise "keeps the studio out of deficit year in, year out"<sup>7</sup> – and it is no surprise that the medium's level of commercialization in Japan fills a humanistic-minded filmmaker like Miyazaki with doubt.

Yet the Japanese animation environment also allows an artist like Miyazaki room to exist where he never could in the United States,<sup>8</sup> because although we collectively refer to the industry with one far-reaching word – 'anime' – the last thing Japanese animation could ever be accused of is homogeneity. Encompassing a vast amount of narrative forms, character types, settings, and time periods, and pitched to a broad set of demographics that include both men and women, children and adults, anime does not play by one set of rules, but by many. Unlike American animation, it is not a genre unto itself, but a broad and diverse artistic medium that plays host to all the genres one finds in live-action cinema – drama, comedy, horror, action, adventure, fantasy, etc. – and many more of its own invention (you could never have a TV show like

*Dragon Ball Z* or *Neon Genesis Evangelion* in American animation, let alone in any nation's live-action cinema, and those are examples of two vastly different popular anime series). The only broadly identifiable trope one might be able to point to as 'uniting' all anime is a heavily generalized conception of the art style, which actually shows far more nuance and stylistic diversity than a western viewer unfamiliar with Japanese animation may be able to spot on first glance.

Because anime is a medium, and not one rigidly defined genre, the opportunity exists for someone like Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata,<sup>9</sup> or the other directors at Studio Ghibli to make passionate, thoughtful art – in multiple genres and pitched at multiple demographics, no less – that has a genuine shot at popularity. Japanese audiences are not conditioned to expect one thing of animation the way American viewers are, and therefore, many kinds of works can be successful. For instance, Takahata's *Only Yesterday* (1991), a serious and adult-oriented animated feature about a 26-year-old woman reevaluating her life on a trip to the Japanese countryside, was the top-grossing domestic feature in Japan the year of its release, earning 1.87 billion yen.<sup>10</sup> Such a film could never even be made, let alone find such success, in American animation (not coincidentally, *Only Yesterday* is the only Ghibli film to have never had any sort of release in North America). Yet in Japan, where animation is not limited by a conventional set of definitions, anything is theoretically possible, and even though Miyazaki has often worked in genres or narrative modes that have broad, popular appeal – fantasy epics, adventures, etc. – it speaks volumes that he is able to imbue so much of himself into his work, making films that are absolutely singular in voice and style, and still achieve such extreme financial success and widespread cultural acceptance in his home country.<sup>11</sup> Part of why the idea of identifying on a profound emotional or intellectual level with animated characters or stories has never held much

weight in western scholarship is because American animation does not allow for ‘auteurs.’ Japanese animation does, and Hayao Miyazaki is proof.

Identification is in fact key to what makes his animation work so well. While many of his films do indeed take place in fantasy landscapes – like the spirit world in *Spirited Away* – or feature fantastical elements and characters – such as the eponymous forest spirit in *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), a film that is otherwise set in reality – the goal never lies in abject escapism. Where the typical function of a Disney film, for instance, is to offer young girls and boys a fantasy they might wish to live out (usually involving, in the ‘Princess’ narrative, a life without responsibilities or want<sup>12</sup>), Miyazaki employs fantasy to explore issues and emotions pertinent to the lives of his viewers (*My Neighbor Totoro* is at its core about two children dealing with the grief and confusion of their mother’s hospitalization). Where American animation asks the viewer to leave all parts of themselves behind once they enter the theater, absconding from the real world through complete visual and narrative fantasy, Miyazaki’s works actively invite identification and engagement. It is all there in the animation itself. The realms he creates on screen, whether a complete fantasy or a slightly adjusted version of our world, are resplendent with detail – not just an overall aesthetic character, but a rigorously defined internal logic that is imbued into every component part of the setting. An environment like the bathhouse in *Spirited Away* or the title kingdom in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* is designed and illustrated as a living and lived-in place, with its own inner-workings, physical presence, and visually apparent history. The detail is so immense, on both a conceptual and aesthetic level, that we are invited to buy in completely to the ‘reality’ of the fantasy, taking it seriously so that we may engage deeply with the stories and themes. This ‘total creation’ of a world is not the exclusive realm of animation, of

course, but it is something the medium can excel at when used to its fullest extent. As journalist Tetsuya Chikushi explains, in conversation with Miyazaki:

In the era of directors like Ozu and Kurosawa, in the Golden Age of Japanese cinema, you could feel how the directors were able to control everything all the way to the edges of the screen. They composed everything you could see at the edges the way they wanted, from the way the telephone poles stood, to the stirring of the trees. And I think the dramatic drop in the ability of the director to control the screen composition is what has led Japanese films to their current awful state. But with animation, it's a different case; you're also able to create everything we see on the screen, from edge to edge.<sup>13</sup>

Most importantly, the design and physicality of Miyazaki's characters is given paramount attention at all times. The human characters of classic Disney films, and in many modern CGI features as well, tend to feel weightless, as if their movements are unbound from the physics of either the real world or the world of the story. It is part of what makes active identification difficult – the character lacks physical tangibility. But in Miyazaki's films, extreme effort is put into considering how the characters move, whether it's the clumsy, timid motions of Chihiro in the early parts of *Spirited Away*, or the assured, experienced speed and ferocity with which San and Ashitaka react to foes in *Princess Mononoke*. His characters are complete physical beings, their motions not always consistent with the laws of our reality, but informed entirely by the reality being created on screen; and in their physicality also exists their personality, one always adding texture and detail to the other. Miyazaki claims that motion is “the true hallmark of animation,”<sup>14</sup> and it is adherence to this belief that makes his characters feel so fundamentally ‘alive,’ even though they are technically nothing more than a series of drawings.

These principles come to bear particularly strongly on the three films analyzed in this study, which offer mundane or historical narratives in realistic settings. For when Miyazaki takes those same skills described above, of deep creative observation and richly detailed world-building, and applies them to a setting culled directly from our world, the results are positively



mesmerizing. These are not films that would, in the western conception of animation, even require the medium. One could take a camera and physically film any of these stories – even *Kiki's Delivery Service*, with the help of a relatively simple special effect. Yet there is a quality to good animation that is uniquely emotive, even – or especially – when applied to everyday setting or stories, a step removed from reality that, when crafted with true passion and a great eye for detail, makes the emotional reality of a character and their environment deeply palpable. Kiki and Shizuku, in particular, are characters one can identify with powerfully, for with the total aesthetic command the medium offers, an animator can consciously project the various fears and anxieties of adolescence into every part of their physical presence. As viewers who have likely experienced similar emotions as these characters, also having gone through the process of maturation and self-identification, these visual qualities have the potential to resonate forcefully. A great actor is also capable of deftly illustrating the interior life of his or her character, of course, but as Miyazaki explains, “a drawing with emotion can be extremely powerful if it accurately captures what you want to express. Frankly, I like the sort of power that can be depicted in animation far more than the clever movements in live-action films.”<sup>15</sup>

Animation is – when tackled with true passion, and not done in a heavily commercialized, assembly-line fashion, as it often is in both America and Japan – an inherently emotional process. It involves an artist sitting at a desk for many hours a day, sketching a movement or illustrating a background in meticulous fashion, creating a visual reality from a starting point of nothingness. For the end result to have identifiable power and impact, the process must be committed to with the whole of one's emotional being. Miyazaki, for his part, has been said to weep openly over his storyboards while illustrating, and will often work while playing on repeat the theme song he has chosen for the film, just to ensure he is in the proper

mood and state of mind.<sup>16</sup> Isao Takahata describes Miyazaki as being completely consumed by his animation when working, “possessed by” and fusing with his characters “to the point where the heightened fireworks of Eros that result actually transform his ideals into flesh and blood.”<sup>17</sup> As for why Miyazaki almost never features simple or direct antagonists in his work, rejecting black-and-white ‘villains’ for more complex creations, Takahata explains that Miyazaki “has to work with his characters for such a long time during productions, and he can’t stand the idea of creating any with whom he cannot identify emotionally.”<sup>18</sup>

The films analyzed in this study are at their core about ethereal and emotional states, interior sensations and abstract concepts that are impossible to quantify. The artifice of animation makes the medium uniquely qualified to summon and explore such states, because for a truly great animated film to come into being, the heart and soul of the creator must be poured into every frame, traces of the animator’s passion left in every line and brushstroke. It is a medium that invites the artist to commit themselves wholly, and can engage the deepest parts of the viewer as a result. At its best, animation asks its creator to pull from his or her own internal being while simultaneously looking past themselves to a world beyond, a world that has not yet come into existence but could – to ‘see with eyes unclouded’ the deepest truths of both our world and this realm of imagination.

In analyzing these films, let us see if we, as viewers, can do the same.

## Endnotes

1. Hayao Miyazaki, “Room to Be Free: Speaking About *Spirited Away* at the Press Conference Held Upon Completion of the Film,” in *Turning Point: 1997-2008*, trans. Beth Carey and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 208.
2. Multiple translations of this quote exist, which could potentially color my use and presentation of it. This translation is from the subtitle track on the 2000 Miramax DVD released in North America, translated by Stephen Alpert and Haruyo Moriyoshi. On the subtitle track from the 2013 “Studio Ghibli ga ippai (Collection)” Japanese Blu-Ray release – the release line from which I draw all other quotations from Ghibli films in this study – translated by Jim Hubbert, the quote instead reads: “Something sinister waits in the lands of the west. If you journey there and search for evil with eyes unclouded, you might find a way to lift the curse.” Both subtitle tracks have their strengths and weaknesses, and one isn’t necessarily more reliable than the other, but I use the Miramax translation here primarily because it is the way I first experienced the film, and the phrase ‘to see with eyes unclouded’ has, obviously, stuck quite powerfully in my mind.
3. Isao Takahata, “The Fireworks of Eros,” in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, Hayao Miyazaki, trans. Beth Carey and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 459.
4. While the films in this study are Japanese, and the original Japanese-language versions shall be the only ones engaged with throughout, I have elected to refer to Studio Ghibli’s films by their English-language titles in the text. Though these are not always literal translations of the Japanese, and would therefore not be my usual preference for discussing foreign-language films, the English-language titles for Ghibli’s features are unique in that they have either been chosen or approved by Studio Ghibli in Japan, where each film has an officially designated English title used on art books, storyboard collections, and promotional materials within the country. I therefore feel confident that these titles accurately reflect the intended spirit of their respective films, and that they are the proper titles to use in an English-language study. Note that in cases where the official English-language title has been altered by the distributor – in the United States, for instance, Disney shortened *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* to *Ponyo*, and removed the word ‘Laputa’ from *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* due to its unintentionally inappropriate Spanish reading – I always defer to Ghibli’s original selection of title.

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5. Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation – Films, Themes, Artistry* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 207.

6. As one of the most important figures in Hayao Miyazaki's career, Toshio Suzuki shall be mentioned in this study on several occasions. He and Miyazaki first worked together in 1982, when Suzuki was working as an editor at *Animage* magazine, and commissioned Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* manga. Suzuki later served on the production committee for the 1984 film adaptation, and came on board Studio Ghibli in 1989 (somewhat serendipitously for this study, his first producer credit on a Miyazaki film is *Kiki's Delivery Service*). He has since produced every Studio Ghibli film, and served as the studio's President from 1990 to 2008. Both Miyazaki and Takahata credit Suzuki for the continuation of their personal friendship – Miyazaki and Takahata have worked together since the 1960s, but their strong and varied personalities may have made an ongoing relationship untenable were it not for Suzuki – and while Suzuki is not an animator, he is as devoted to the creative success of these films as anyone else at Ghibli, and deserves recognition for their successful creation and release.

7. McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*, 209.

8. Case in point: Miyazaki's highest grossing film in the US, *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*, earned a grand total of just over \$15 million, versus the \$164.5 million it grossed in Japan. Attempts to make his films popular in the United States have been such resounding failures that Disney, worldwide distributor of Ghibli's films, has largely ceded the North American theatrical license for most Ghibli features to GKids, a small distributor of foreign animation.

9. Isao Takahata is, along with Miyazaki, the co-founder of Studio Ghibli, and its other most significant director. He and Miyazaki go back a very long ways, their working relationship beginning in the 1960s. Several years older than Miyazaki, Takahata began his career at Toei four years before Miyazaki did, and when Miyazaki joined in 1963, Takahata took the young animator under his wing. Through the 1960s and 70s, the two collaborated on a number of television shows and films, with Takahata directing and Miyazaki supervising animation and character designs. Takahata himself does not animate – something highly unusual for a Japanese animation director – meaning that he relies heavily on his art staff for the visual design. Miyazaki served this function for a solid 15 years, until their partnership ended with the 1979 television series *Anne of Green Gables*, when Miyazaki left to direct his first film, *Lupin the III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979). From there, Miyazaki never transitioned out of the role of director, and he and Takahata worked on their projects separately. In the early days of Studio Ghibli, they produced one

another's films, but after Suzuki joined, and subsequently produced everything, they have had little direct involvement in one another's work. Takahata is a tremendously talented director in his own right, having made at least two flat-out masterpieces with Studio Ghibli: *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) and *Only Yesterday* (1991), the former of which may be the studio's single greatest feature.

10. According to the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan's online database, which was consulted in other quotations of box-office figures given in these notes. <http://www.eiren.org/toukei/1991.html>

11. Starting with 1991's *Porco Rosso*, each of Miyazaki's directorial works has been Japan's highest-grossing film in the year of its release (six films in a row), and he has twice set the record for Japan's all-time highest-grossing feature, first with *Princess Mononoke*, and later with *Spirited Away* – which, at a worldwide gross of \$274.5 million (\$229.6 million from Japan alone, and only \$10 million from the US), is easily the highest-grossing non-English-language film in history. To say Miyazaki is a commercial juggernaut in Japan would be an understatement – America has no contemporary analogue for that kind of sustained box-office dominance.

12. Miyazaki has on occasion used 'Princess' characters in his films too, but in a way that is polar opposite from what Disney does. For Miyazaki, 'Princess' denotes responsibility. In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), for example, the title character is the Princess of her people, a relatively small independent country living in an isolated valley. Her people love, respect, and admire her not because of who she is, but because of what she does. Nausicaä works tirelessly for her subjects, making sure they have what they need and also, when the time comes, fighting to her last breath for their survival. She is depicted as a wonderful and exemplary person, and that is precisely what makes her fit to be called 'Princess.' The title tells her she has something to live up to, and she rises to her responsibility at every possible turn. It is a position she earns, not one she is handed, and more than anything, her intense lack of self-centeredness makes her a vastly better role model than any Disney 'Princess.'

13. Hayao Miyazaki, "It's a Tough Era, But It May Be the Most Interesting of All: A Conversation with Tetsuya Chikushi," in *Turning Point: 1997-2008*, trans. Beth Carey and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 231.

14. Hayao Miyazaki, "Thoughts on Japanese Animation," in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 76.

15. Ibid.

16. Takahata, “The Fireworks of Eros,” 456. Miyazaki’s penchant for listening to his theme songs while working can be seen in the Nippon Television special on the making of *Spirited Away*, contained on the film’s 2003 DVD released by Disney in North America, and in the documentary film *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness* (2013; Dir. Mami Sunada). As an aside, I find myself quite moved by the theme songs for these films as well – enough for each of the chapter titles in this study to be named after the film’s closing vocal piece.

17. Takahata, “The Fireworks of Eros,” 456.

18. Ibid.



## Chapter One: *Enveloped in Tenderness*

*Kiki's Delivery Service* and the journey towards a creative spirit

*In our youth, at a certain time we had to 'start' something, to start on something of our own volition. We felt we were expected to start something, no matter what form it took. We chose a path for our future and started on it. This is why, when creating a story, I begin it with a certain form and depict the process of the journey. That is what I have always thought films were about.*

Hayao Miyazaki, 1998<sup>1</sup>

The opening frame of *Kiki's Delivery Service* is positively disarming in its calmness.

We are not conditioned to be taken aback by such things – a light breeze across the clouds and grass, a dancing shimmer upon the water, a still landscape of forest and hills, a soundscape silent save for the noises of rustling brush and softly chirping birds. Yet the evocation of serenity is absolute, and as we are gently shocked into tranquility, the image pans to introduce us to a young girl, lying in the brush and listening to the radio, her bright red bow and unassuming dress blowing in the breeze, no different than the grass and water around her.

It is from this stillness that Kiki, the film's protagonist, emerges, and it is within the composure of the brief but powerful opening sequence that follows that the stylistic, thematic,

and emotional template for the film to come is set. Very little happens – Kiki gazes at the sky, closes her eyes, and opens them having made a decision, before getting up and running off out of the frame. Yet in so deeply, deftly illustrating this simultaneously fleeting and crucial moment in Kiki’s life – the moment in which she definitively chooses to leave home – these six shots and 47 seconds prime us for a film that is entirely about life’s interludes, those small moments in which a person’s individualism and personal spirit are forged. The film as a whole depicts only a brief ‘moment’ in Kiki’s life – the final scene reveals that the entirety of the film’s action is summarized in Kiki’s first letter home to her parents – and yet within this moment an impossibly rich character study is weaved, one that touches upon themes as significant as generational conflict and globalization, as intimate as social anxiety and the challenges of independence, and as broad and ethereal as the nature of talent and paradoxes of emotion. It is about that moment in a person’s life when one finally manages to find perspective on oneself, feeling confident about one’s own individual spirit and function in society, and while such breakthroughs are only the first step towards true, sustained independence, the detail and passion with which Miyazaki breathes life into this moment, and into all the even smaller moments that comprise it, renders the film a deftly piercing illustration of the foundational significance of those first steps we take when leaving the calm and comfort of home.

Released in 1989, *Kiki’s Delivery Service* was Miyazaki’s fifth film, and represented a subtle yet profound evolution in his storytelling. Visual majesty, aesthetic invention, and a close eye for character arc and detail had always been fundamental to his work, but where earlier films like *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* had tackled environmental and humanist themes through the lenses of fantasy and adventure, *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, like its immediate predecessor, *My Neighbor Totoro*, saw Miyazaki presenting his



characters and ideas in a setting that much more closely resembled our world. By restricting the fantasy elements to infrequent interludes involving the title character, and by exploring the more intimate, immediate issue of how children process grief, *My Neighbor Totoro* simplified Miyazaki's narrative and aesthetic design while simultaneously enhancing the emotional dimension of his work, a path *Kiki's Delivery Service* followed by minimizing fantasy and maximizing emotional realism. Though the film's setting is fictionalized, its design is rooted heavily in observations of then-contemporary Sweden, its atmosphere is meant to feel recognizable rather than fantastic. Similarly, while Kiki is a witch, her powers are limited, and she struggles with a wide range of complex human emotions that are applicable not only to adolescents or children, but to people of all ages.

In particular, *Kiki's Delivery Service* was Miyazaki's first film to explore notions of creativity, a theme that not coincidentally coincides with the director's first clear use of a reflexive voice in his storytelling. Through the basic set-up of Kiki venturing out into the world to become independent by mastering and utilizing her talents, and through Kiki's friendships with flight-obsessed Tombo and self-sufficient painter Ursula – both of whom introduce Kiki to alternate forms of talent and creativity, which in turn helps her to understand her own abilities – *Kiki's Delivery Service* is quite clearly the product of an artist musing on artistry. While the film is about much more than creativity, the centralization of so many human-scale issues in Kiki's character arc demonstrates how inseparable a spirit of independence and confidence are in discovering and maintaining one's creative spirit. One side of one's spirit cannot be accessed without the other, the film argues, and in so poignantly presenting this unified theory for the formation of human identity, *Kiki's Delivery Service* created a template for exploring notions of creativity, independence, and communal living that Miyazaki would continually return to in the

future. *Spirited Away*, the director's best known and most acclaimed film in the West, owes a major structural and thematic debt to *Kiki*, as it is essentially a thematically denser and more obviously fantastical version of the earlier film's story; *Porco Rosso* (1992) and *The Wind Rises* operate even more obviously in the reflexive voice first experimented with here; and *Whisper of the Heart* would apply many of the same ideas to a wholly realistic and contemporary Japan, with a much greater focus on creativity in particular. Clearly, *Kiki* was a breakthrough in Miyazaki's artistic journey to probe and explore the emotional and ethereal dimensions of the human condition, and that he would build upon it several times in the future demonstrates just how foundational this film and its ideas are to the arc and substance of his filmography.

What, then, are the conditions for a creative and independent spirit Miyazaki outlines here? The first, clearly, is a setting in which one can feel comfortable and productive, a theme so prominent that it not only deeply informs the film's entire visual design, but is introduced in the aforementioned, attention-grabbing opening frame. By letting the shot linger on the countryside setting, giving the audience time to observe and internalize its imagery and atmosphere before panning over to reveal the film's heroine, Miyazaki trains the viewer to understand that an individual is inseparable from their environment, and that one cannot be studied without the other. Particularly with regards to the natural world, it is an idea Miyazaki considers to be characteristically Japanese:

The gods in Japan are neither purely good nor purely evil. The same god can at times be ferocious and at other times bring about gentle greenery. This is the kind of belief Japanese people have held all along. Even though we have become a modern people, we still feel that there is a place where, if we go deep into the mountains, we can find a forest full of beautiful greenery and pure running water that is like a dreamscape. And this kind of sensibility, I think, links us to our spirituality ... This may be a type of primitivism. Our ethnic character harbors the elemental power of the forest within a precious part of our spirit.<sup>2</sup>

This is an important point to consider, for although the majority of *Kiki's Delivery Service* takes place in an overtly Western setting, the opening minutes, before Kiki takes flight, paint a detailed picture of Kiki's childhood home – a home that seems much more distinctly Japanese than it does Western. There is abundant greenery, forestation, plant life and color packed into every frame of the film's first seven minutes, with houses and trails and roads seeming to barely intrude upon the natural landscape, rather than overwhelm it, just as Miyazaki, Isao Takahata, and other directors at Studio Ghibli have always depicted the Japanese countryside. Compare the image of Kiki running home along a dirt trail to any given exterior shot from *My Neighbor Totoro* or *Only Yesterday*, for instance, and were it not for Kiki's characteristic red bow, one might be hard-pressed to tell which film is which.



*Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989)



*My Neighbor Totoro* (1988)



*Only Yesterday* (1991; Dir. Isao Takahata)

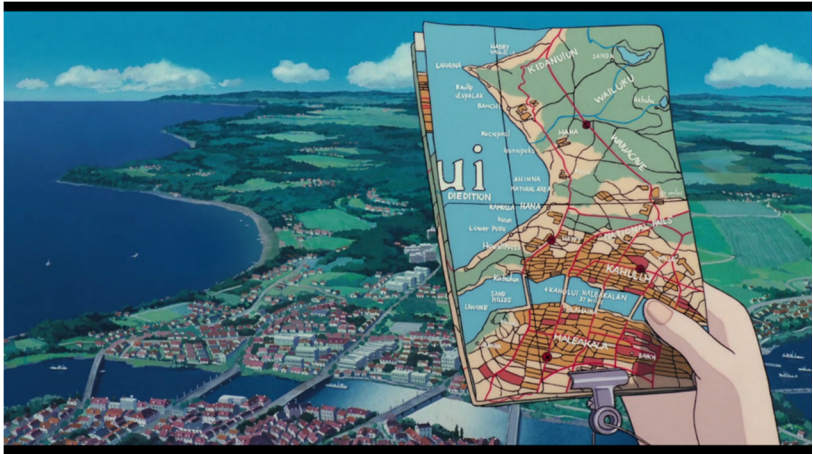
Moreover, all the writing we see in the opening minutes of the film is Japanese – the sign on Kiki's house, the labels on her mother's ingredient drawers – as is the spoken language on

Kiki's radio; instances of both will be in English or other Western languages when Kiki arrives in the town of Corico.<sup>3</sup> The characters here look more ethnically Japanese, as anime characters go,<sup>4</sup> than people will in the big city, and the exteriors and interiors of houses appear more Eastern than Western. Crucially, there is a heavy emphasis on tradition throughout the opening scene; Kiki interrupts a planned camping trip with her father, old woman Dora reflects on when Kiki's mother first arrived in town many years ago, and Kiki is given her mother's broomstick before departing. The sum total of all this cultural specificity – some clearly Japanese, some part of the film's invented witch heritage – has a dual effect.

On one hand, and perhaps most importantly in regards to the film's broader themes, Miyazaki is ensuring that we understand where Kiki comes from before she leaves. This is clearly an environment in which she feels safe, comfortable, and loved, and as the story goes to show in its progression, this setting has shaped Kiki in many important ways. Having been brought up in a small town where people help one another out, where kindness and attentiveness are expected and reciprocated, and where nature is always at one's fingertips, plays a big part in making Kiki the person she is, and some of her strongest moments of success and self-actualization in the rest of the film come from her ability to apply these countryside values in the big city (particularly in the episode with the old woman and the pie, where Kiki's knowledge of how to work a brick oven – and, moreover, her instinct to stay and help even though time is tight – saves the day and earns her a valuable friend). Kiki turns out to be special for many reasons, but her childhood environment and upbringing play a crucial part in that, and it is because that setting is illustrated with such specificity that we understand this point moving forward.

On the other, it cannot be ignored that part of this setting's specificity is its Japanese-ness – just as it cannot be ignored, once Kiki arrives in Corico, how nonexistent the character and

culture of Japan is in the big city. The contrast is intriguing, especially considering that Corico is no less specific, detailed, or deliberate a setting than Kiki's hometown (moreso, in fact, considering how much more time the film takes to explore it). Corico is based on the city of Visby, located on the Swedish island of Gotland, where Miyazaki and three senior staff members visited for inspiration before production, ending up "with 80 rolls of 24-exposure film and three boxes of research material."<sup>5</sup> The visit was fundamental to the film's creation, as it was only after returning to Japan that Miyazaki wrote the screenplay and he and his animators started creating concept art.<sup>6</sup> The end result is one of the most impeccably detailed and visually rich settings in any Miyazaki work, a vast city of rich, weathered textures and warm, lush colors.<sup>7</sup> Corico may be an idealized space – a "dream of Europe as it never was but should have been," describes Helen McCarthy<sup>8</sup> – but with its dense rows of sturdy, ornate European buildings on a rolling, uneven landscape, connected by worn brick streets bustling with people and cars, Corico also has a palpable, lived-in atmosphere (concept art even shows a rough but full map of the city's geography, demonstrating the film's deeply thoughtful spatial design<sup>9</sup>). The idealistic nature of Corico is therefore grounded in a high degree of aesthetic and intellectual specificity. It does not exist in an entirely nebulous chronological state, but in an alternate history version of the 1950s, one where the Hindenberg likely never crashed, leading to the proliferation of "dirigible" air travel, and where McCarthy reports Miyazaki stating that "World War II did not take place"<sup>10</sup> – all of which informs Corico's distinctive character and colors Kiki's arc over the course of the film.<sup>11</sup>



There are several ways to approach the nature of Corico as it relates to the film's thematic tapestry, and perhaps the simplest explanation is that, for a film in which creativity is fundamentally important, and multiple kinds of creative talent and artistry are displayed and explored, the striking painterly aesthetic Corico provides helps to make the audience conducive to all discussions of creative energy on a subliminal level. Yet there is likely a further ideological component to the town's distinct Western flair and particular alternate history elements, and it is significant that while Miyazaki has made films predominantly set in Western-styled locations – *Laputa*, *Porco Rosso*, *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) – and films that are utterly and entirely Japanese – *Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away*, *The Wind Rises* – *Kiki's Delivery Service* is the only entry in his filmography that seems to consciously bridge the two cultures. It is not only that Kiki comes to Corico from a more Japanese setting, but that she brings her Japanese-ness with her. The sign she creates for her delivery service in the bakery window is the only instance of Japanese writing after Kiki leaves home – おとどけものいたします、きき ("I deliver...Kiki"<sup>12</sup>) – and part of why her character design seems so strikingly unique and iconic throughout is that she does appear ethnically different compared to other prominent characters in town.

With this in mind, Carol Ota's assertion "that the search by Kiki for a place in a new community is an allegory of the search by Japanese society for a sense of place in the world of the globalizing era"<sup>13</sup> makes sense, especially when one factors in Miyazaki's choice of chronology and alternate history details. The 1950s were a defining decade for Japan on the world stage, as the Allied occupation ended in 1952 and the nation was permitted to start defining itself beyond its wartime actions. Japanese cinema became a fixture of global culture early in the decade, with the 1951 submittal of *Rashomon* (1950; Dir. Akira Kurosawa) to the Venice Film Festival and subsequent acclaim and success, while the seeds for Japan's most singularly identifiable cultural product – anime, a tradition to which *Kiki's Delivery Service* belongs – were planted when Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* manga began serialization in 1952 (the landmark TV animation adaptation, widely considered to be the birth of 'anime,' came in 1963). The globalization element of *Kiki's Delivery Service* is understated but undeniable, with Corico acting as a clearly identifiable mishmash of products, generations, and cultures (the town is visibly Swedish, but also vaguely Germanic, particularly in regards to the Zeppelin), and it is not difficult to see Kiki's journey to assert her presence in this modern, complicated landscape as allegorical to Japan's search for a voice amidst the global bustle. "The implication," writes Ota, "is that the audience can use the film to get a sense of how to find the place of Japan and themselves in the world just as Kiki uses her map to find her way through the town that is her new home."<sup>14</sup>

Returning to the more intimate scale the film operates on, though, the most important takeaway here is that no matter where we are from, we are deeply touched by the culture and environment in which we were raised, and no matter where we are going, the contrast between our old and new settings will inevitably reflect upon our character and actions. Corico is a large,

diverse, challenging setting for Kiki to find herself in, and if being comfortable in one's environment is a primary condition for an independent, creative spirit to flourish, it naturally follows that Kiki's greatest challenge over the course of the film is to overcome the crippling anxiety she develops in the big city. It is not enough to merely find a job or hone a talent, but to learn how to comfortably exist in the setting she has chosen, interacting with others and contributing to society as a human being, not merely as a person who can fly. "In her world, witches are not unusual at all," Miyazaki explains. "The real challenge Kiki faces is that, as part of her training, she must live for a year in an unfamiliar town and gets its inhabitants to recognize her as a full-fledged witch."<sup>15</sup> And being a 'full-fledged' anything – witch, baker, painter, person, etc. – means having the confidence to face the world not only without fear, but with a true vitality for life. Without that, talent, no matter how substantial, means very little indeed.

As with all ideas in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, this is a point explored through small, quiet episodes and interludes, where our conception of Kiki is defined by how she acts and reacts in moments that might, in a less gentle and intelligent film, be deemed insubstantial. Here, those scenes – Kiki gazing longingly at a dress in a shop window, recoiling from other children whenever they pass by or reach out to her, choosing to sulk in her room rather than accept a party invitation, etc. – are deeply imbued with substance, a series of naturalistic but complex observations on the nature of social anxiety, each loaded with insight into the unconscious dimensions of adolescent emotions.

The portrait of anxiety Miyazaki illustrates here may best be described as an unconscious gap between how one perceives oneself and how one is perceived by the outside world. Think of Kiki gazing longingly at the nice clothes in the shop window (where the strikingly solid and



vivid red of the fancy shoes is featured in full frame, a more vibrant red even than Kiki's bow, and a contrast to the weathered colors of Corico), coupled with all the times she is self-deprecating about her traditional witch's garb, perceiving it to be bland and out of fashion. Kiki is worried that her clothing may hold her back from being a part of this town, where people dress differently and consumerist fashion is a near-constant presence, but ruminating on such a concern prevents her from understanding that the 'traditional' clothes she wears are part of what makes her special. They are an extension of her history and her culture, and Osono is not being disingenuous when she tells Kiki that her dress makes her look "beautiful and mysterious."<sup>16</sup> If Kiki could escape her own headspace for that moment and see herself the way Osono sees her, much of her anxiety about the party would disappear in a heartbeat.

But doing so is difficult, and that gap in perspective plagues her on multiple occasions. She cannot help but distrust Tombo when he begins reaching out to her, believing his interest in her as a witch comes from a place of jest or mockery, when in truth it is a sincere enthusiasm based on Kiki's unique individual qualities. When she passes other young women on the street, dressed extravagantly and having fun, she acts as if she is disgusted by them, but once they have passed, she confesses to Jiji that she too wishes she "had something pretty to wear." It is an inherent contradiction for her to be jealous of people she apparently dislikes – something Miyazaki illustrates by having Kiki's face reflected in a shop window while she verbally expresses her jealousy, so that there are literally two Kiki's on screen at once, the reflection looking more melancholy and vulnerable than the real Kiki's steely, determined visage – and that dichotomy reflects her own gap in perspective. Kiki is not recoiling from these other children because of who they are or what they are doing – she knows absolutely nothing about them – but because she is insecure about her own character and worth, worried she might not be good

enough to be around others. And whenever the opportunity arises for Kiki to perceive external evidence of her own insecurities, she accepts it; after working hard to help the kind old lady bake the herring pie, and then struggling to deliver it in the rain, Kiki finds herself unable to focus on her own hard work and success, but only on the granddaughter's rude dismissal of the pie upon delivery. The dismissal is not really aimed at Kiki – as Miyazaki notes, being “given the cold shoulder” is something “that happens sometimes when you run a delivery service”<sup>17</sup> – but with Kiki so caught up in her own perspective, it is inevitable that she takes the girl's rudeness personally, believing it reflects on nonexistent failings of her own. And once she is consumed by feelings of inadequacy, attending Tombo's party becomes an impossibility.



Looking beyond her own perspective is especially hard for Kiki when she is on her own in a new city, one so different from home. This is a universal experience, of course – that whatever anxieties or insecurities one might naturally tend towards are inevitably intensified whenever one moves somewhere new or goes out on one's own – and Miyazaki illustrates it cleverly here, with Kiki's ability to fly acting as an allegory for how we tend to retreat into our

own individualism at times when we should be reaching out to others and trying to become familiar with a new setting. As Miyazaki explains:

What's most important for Kiki is not that her business succeed – though of course that is no doubt important – it is how she herself can become acquainted with many different people. While she rides on her broom accompanied by her cat and flies around the sky, she is free. That's because she's at a distance from people. But to live in the town, in other words, to train for a profession, requires her to confront herself in an honest way. In terms of Kiki, can she become someone who can comfortably walk around town alone and converse with people without her broom or cat?<sup>18</sup>

Kiki's relationship with said cat, Jiji, is symbolic of how her relationship with Corico and its people evolves over the course of the film. A major turning point in the story is the moment when Jiji stops speaking, and Kiki can only hear him purring like a normal cat. Before this transition, Jiji's ability to communicate is emblematic of Kiki's reluctance to open up; she clings to what she knows, staying at a distance from the town through flight and keeping Jiji by her side at all times, rather than reaching out to others. What she needs to do, if she is to truly become a part of this town and find her individual footing in the world, is to accept new people and experiences into her life, and it is just after she first attempts to do this – accompanying Tombo on a trip to the beach, before rushing back home after Tombo's other friends come to join them – that Jiji's voice disappears. It is the moment at which her anxiety hits a fever pitch – “I think something's wrong with me,” she confesses to Jiji, wondering why “that other me, the cheerful, honest one went away somewhere” – and once Jiji is stripped away (which foretells Kiki's loss of magical power), she must learn to become a part of this community, or risk having nothing. And it is significant that even though Kiki does, eventually, ingratiate herself into the community at the film's end, Jiji's voice never returns. It is symbolic of Kiki having finally moved on, and that little, barely perceptible nod of acceptance she gives Jiji when he joins her at the end of the film, still purring rather than talking, is a beautiful illustration of how far she has come.<sup>19</sup>

While Kiki walks this path, though, the film employs an interesting back-and-forth structure, alternating between marvelously executed set-pieces of Kiki using her wit and willpower to overcome challenges at work – the delivery of the stuffed cat and complications with the crows, the emergency preparation and rainy transport of the pie – and quietly nuanced portraits of Kiki grappling with insecurity, unable to see such obvious evidence of her own self-worth and therefore too fraught with anxiety to make a connection with other people or become comfortable in her surroundings. And yet, even as she lacks the perspective necessary to see what a good job she is doing with her delivery service, Kiki still believes that her magic, and her magic alone, is what makes her special, to the exclusion of almost everything else - which makes losing touch with that magic both an inevitability and a trigger for even great anxiety and insecurity.

Early in the film, during an encounter with a slightly older and conceited witch, Kiki is introduced to the idea of having a “special skill,” and determines, based on the confidence with which this other witch carries herself, that she has to have a special skill to succeed – that whatever talent she can find and define within herself is the thing that will allow her to excel in life. This is clearly another instance of limited perspective, for while having talent is indeed a key condition for finding and maintaining an independent, creative spirit, one cannot rely upon it entirely.

Talent itself, after all, is not inherently special. Writers, singers, painters, and all other sorts of artists do not lay exclusive claim to their talent, but share it with multitudes – it is how that talent is specifically accessed and utilized within the context of one’s culture and environment that makes a skill special, and which allows one to live with a creative spirit. The same goes for Kiki – her ability to fly is not inherently remarkable, as she is far from the only

witch in this world and flight technology is rapidly proliferating among ‘regular’ humans like Tombo. Her talent becomes noteworthy in how she chooses to apply it, and what ultimately makes her special is finding a way to make that talent valuable within the context of her community. Only then, and with a confidence in herself and in her place in the world, can an independent spirit truly be achieved.

Happenstance plays a major role in the development of Kiki’s arc, as it must for a film so focused on the significance of individual, fleeting moments. There is a tremendously serendipitous quality to Kiki’s first meeting with Osono, for example, not only because Osono will quickly become one of Kiki’s greatest supporters, but because running into Osono at the exact moment a customer has left a pacifier at the bakery gives Kiki a chance to unconsciously blend her personality with her talent. It is not Kiki’s ability to fly that is the key discovery of the scene, but that she is naturally disposed towards helping others, going the extra mile even for a total stranger. Flight is the ability that allows this part of herself to shine forth, but it is her kindness and determination that sees the pacifier returned, and it is those qualities, not her witchhood, that endears her to Osono. It is the same as when Kiki helps the old woman finish the pie, or jumps into action to save Tombo during the dirigible disaster at the film’s climax. Life presents Kiki with a moment to act, she rises to meet the challenge, and both she and her talent are defined by the empathy and determination she puts forth. It is the same for all creative people; we are shaped not by the presence or strength of our talent, but by how we apply that talent when given the opportunity to do so. In this way, we might say that Kiki’s true talent is not flight itself, but her natural inclination to put others equal to or above herself, and tackle their problems with the same or greater effort as she would tackle her own.

Having Osono in her life is another wonderful bit of serendipity, of course, for Osono is exactly the kind of person Kiki needs looking out for her while fostering her talent. One of the great ironies of independence is that it cannot be arrived at independently; we all need an Osono in our lives when journeying to find our own individual spirit, someone who can show us kindness and provide us with a warm, comforting presence, but who can also give us an ideal to work towards. Osono gives Kiki an awful lot – free room, board, and breakfast, and use of the bakery telephone and storefront for Kiki’s business – and in doing so, she does not allow Kiki to slide into lethargy, but instead inspires Kiki to hold herself up to that same standard of kindness and consideration. Osono need not tell Kiki to work hard, whether in the delivery service or helping out around the bakery, for when someone demonstrates trust in us, we are naturally inclined to work our hardest to make sure that trust is earned. And that, in turn, helps us to discover our own individuality, learning who we are as a person while striving to honor the example of the person who made us feel worthwhile. It is unlikely that any individual who has ever successfully honed a creative spirit did so without someone like Osono – as *Kiki’s Delivery Service* teaches us again and again, it is a journey we cannot afford to walk in isolation.

The two friends Kiki makes during the film, Tombo and Ursula, are further examples of this, for while it is hardly easy for her to open up to either of them, their presence is essential when she hits her lowest point, and having these people in her life helps her to understand the universality of her experience. Tombo and Ursula are both on similar personal journeys, each having a talent or passion they strive to integrate into their lives much the same way as Kiki. And just as these characters serve to broaden Kiki’s perspective, it is through Tombo and Ursula that Miyazaki introduces alternate forms of creativity into the narrative, making it clear that while this is a broadly applicable story about an adolescent finding her place in the world, it is also a

reflexive musing on how artists come to understand their own creativity. Both characters seem to be a direct expression of Miyazaki's personal voice, with Ursula consciously ruminating on the deep-seated mysteries of talent (something Miyazaki is often prone to discuss in essays, speeches, and interviews<sup>20</sup>), and Tombo fostering an unceasingly enthusiastic love for flight technologies of all kinds.<sup>21</sup>

Tombo and Kiki's relationship – that of the female protagonist being inspired by the boy chasing his creative dreams, and who has her eyes opened to other forms of artistry by being exposed to his talent – acts as a sort of prototype for several friendships in future Miyazaki works: Most notably Shizuku and Shinji in *Whisper of the Heart*, but there are also shades of Sen and Haku in *Spirited Away*, or Umi and Shun in *From Up on Poppy Hill* (2011; Dir. Goro Miyazaki). Yet this sort of relationship works better here than anywhere else, in part because of the relaxed atmosphere of the film, which allows both characters to feel wholly naturalistic in their interactions, and in part because they are younger than many of those other 'couples,' and gender and sexuality matter less in their friendship. There really is no romantic component to Kiki and Tombo's relationship (while Kiki does silently reflect upon the possibilities and pressures of romance when she sees teen couples around town, she is too young to consciously apply those worries to Tombo), which nullifies most of the problematic, lopsided, or underdeveloped gender dynamics as they exist (however minutely) in Miyazaki's other heterosocial adolescent relationships. Kiki and Tombo are children and individuals first, gendered beings second, and that allows the relevant themes of their friendship – being inspired by someone else's unique qualities or passions, and feeling more comfortable in the world because of that inspiration – to shine through loud and clear.

Kiki and Ursula provide a refreshing gender dynamic of their own, for here are two female friends who simply get to enjoy one another's company, for long stretches of time, without being made to talk about boys or have their gender become a narrative or thematic point. It is simply a warm illustration of friendship between women, a relationship most films throughout history, no matter their place of origin or medium of creation, have generally neglected to include.<sup>22</sup>

Ursula also opens Kiki's eyes to alternate forms of talent and passion, though the character's most important role in the film is of course the guidance she shows Kiki after Kiki loses her magical power. If the structure of the film's first two-thirds is to alternate between Kiki successfully honing her talent and Kiki unsuccessfully grappling with social anxiety, the two halves merge when her magic goes away, and the film's final third is all about Kiki finally coming to see what others see in her, finding a measure of confidence and fully accessing her individual spirit by coming to understand the impact she has had on others, and how clearly that reflects on her own talent and worth. The old woman in Corico does a great deal to boost Kiki's confidence with the cake, a simple gesture which shows how much Kiki's effort during the pie episode really mattered, but it is undeniably Ursula who helps Kiki understand herself the most.

Ursula's simple action of coming to town to visit Kiki, and then inviting Kiki to come spend the night in her cabin, is enough to start shaking Kiki out of her apathy. And when the two actually begin their short journey, a fairly rapid influx of internal revelations takes place. In one moment, while Kiki and Ursula are riding a bus out of Corico, they pass over a bridge, with a shot from Kiki's point of view showing a light dancing upon the water, rushing by as though it is striving to keep pace with the bus. For a fleeting moment, Kiki's attention is drawn, as if in a trance, to look out upon the ocean, and at how the town sits comfortably on its edges, and she



seems to see in this place, however briefly, what she first saw in it – all the beauty and possibility that exists in this seaside town, this place that is big, bustling, and intimidating yet still situated within nature. And as Kiki and Ursula continue their journey, from concrete roads to dirt ones, up grassy hills and into the dense, isolated forest, the spatial transformation further infuses Kiki with joy, her insecurities disappearing as she is once again attuned to the natural surroundings she first emerged from.

Most importantly, when Kiki arrives at Ursula's cabin, there is a new, large-canvas painting waiting there for her, inspiring a sense of awe in Kiki even before she learns that she herself inspired it. An eclectic painting, combining sketch-work and pointillism, crayons and pastels, deep, dark blues and night-shaded greens, the image depicts a flying horse and ox soaring above two cabins, the horse ridden by a disembodied girl and accompanied by a small flock of crows, as Ursula herself stands atop one of the cabins and the moon glows red above them. The painting, originally created by a teacher and her students at a school for the disabled,<sup>23</sup> was chosen for its ability to “convey the life of a secluded female artist,”<sup>24</sup> and indeed seems characteristic of Ursula, an individual painter, rather than belonging to the overall aesthetic of the film's world. This is part of what makes the painting so powerful, especially once Ursula asks Kiki to pose for her while she revises the image. That a friend could be inspired to create something so stunning by simply encountering Kiki, could appropriate Kiki's image in an artwork of such immense voice and passion, obviously means more to Kiki than she can easily express. The painting is proof that Kiki has worth in the eyes of others – proof that she cannot deny from this point forward, and that she can incorporate into her own perspective as a facet of her growing confidence.



Finally, it is Ursula's willingness to listen to Kiki's problems and share what she herself has learned, as a fellow creative individual, that means the most to Kiki at this juncture. As Miyazaki elaborates:

What I think becomes most necessary for a girl like Kiki is a place to take refuge ... I think it is her getting to know someone who will respect and understand her in her struggle with a life she doesn't understand well. This is why she asks Ursula if she can visit from time to time. Ursula answers that she will be there during the summer. This place becomes critical for Kiki in her effort to bounce back. The old lady who baked Kiki a cake was a nice acquaintance. But what gave Kiki more pleasure was the first person who visited her room as a friend, not as a landlord. What's more, Ursula understands Kiki's anguish in an affirming way. I think these aspects are much more valuable to Kiki than whether her business will succeed.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, there is a beautiful affirmation to the words Ursula shares with Kiki, and while Miyazaki is often acclaimed for his unrivaled visual imagination, a scene like this demonstrates the subtle, insightful power of his writing, masterfully combining notions of artistic block with Kiki's character arc and the fantasy of the film to say something truly profound about the human condition:

Ursula: Painting and magical powers seem to be very similar. Sometimes I can't paint a thing.

Kiki: You mean it? Then what happens? ... Without even thinking about it, I used to be able to fly. Now I can't even begin to remember how I ever managed to do it.

Ursula: At times like that, you know what I do? Paint. It gets rid of my frustrations.

Kiki: But still, if I can't fly...

Ursula: Then I just stop. Take long walks, look at the scenery, doze off at noon. Don't do a thing. Then, suddenly, I'm able to paint again ... When I was your age, I'd already decided to become an artist. I loved painting. So much that I couldn't sleep. Then one day, for no reason, I became unable to paint. So I just kept on painting anyway, but still it was no good. I realized that I was just imitating other paintings. Just copies of paintings I'd seen elsewhere. I swore I'd make my own paintings ... But after that, it's not much easier now. I think I found what painting means, at least for me. To fly, you don't chant a spell or something, right?

Kiki: No, we fly with our spirit.

Ursula: The witch's spirit? Perfect! That's what I'm talking about. The spirit of witches, the spirit of artists. The spirit of bakers! I suppose it must be a power given by God. Sometimes you suffer for it.

That is the entire movie, right there, summarized in one beautiful conversation. The individual spirit, the goal of Kiki's journey throughout the film, is no different from the creative spirit of artists, and all of us who walk this path shall inevitably be baffled by it from time to time. We cannot fight it, for that is a losing battle, but neither can we force it; sometimes we shall suffer for it, and sometimes we shall be saved by it, but all we can do in our daily lives is to work hard to nurture it, trying our best to create the proper conditions for our inner spirit to flourish. Feeling comfortable in the setting one has chosen to inhabit, knowing what one's talent contributes to one's society, being able to look upon oneself honestly and not be stricken with insecurity or doubt, so that one may be able to have confidence in one's individualism...these are the lessons Kiki learns over the course of the film, and these are the lessons *Kiki's Delivery Service* imparts upon the viewer.

When Kiki writes the letter to her parents in the film's closing moments, summarizing the action of the story and finally being able to declare that "all in all, I sure love this town," we are made simultaneously aware that this film has only encompassed a brief moment in the arc of her life, and that, in illustrating the steps it takes for her to arrive at this point, as an individual, this moment is of unspeakable emotional significance. Given all the little, beautifully observed details upon which the film is built, all the honesty and vulnerability and insight that leads the character to have this independent spirit when the end credits roll, that closing line – in essence, 'I can still be sad, but that is okay, because overall, I think I have found happiness' – resonates powerfully, and seems to encompass a pretty wide swath of human experience.

No wonder Miyazaki would return to this template again. The core thematic and structural tenants of *Kiki's Delivery Service* would inform his work for years to come, most notably in his two most powerful works about the emotions, desires, and problems of young people in contemporary Japan: *Whisper of the Heart* and *Spirited Away*, the former of which, with a narrative about creative expression as a path towards individuality, is the natural thematic successor to the ideas presented in *Kiki*.

Interestingly, in 1991, two years after the release of *Kiki's Delivery Service* and four years before the release of *Whisper of the Heart*, Miyazaki had this to say on his interest in making such a film:

As a filmmaker, I have continued to think that the main challenge we face in Japan today is to survive without being crushed to death by our repressive society. For the last ten years, I had been thinking of addressing this topic by making a youth movie set in present-day Tokyo, but I'm giving up the idea.<sup>26</sup>

How lucky we are that Miyazaki changed his mind.

## Endnotes

1. Hayao Miyazaki, “What Grown-ups Can Tell Children So That They Can Live in a Happy Time,” in *Turning Point: 1997 – 2008*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 150.
2. Hayao Miyazaki, “The Elemental Power of the Forest Also Lives Within the Hearts of Human Beings,” in *Turning Point: 1997 – 2008*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 36.
3. Different writers spell the name of the town differently; taken from the script or storyboards, it would be romanized as ‘Koriko,’ as there is no ‘C’ in the Japanese alphabet, but since the name is presumably intended to sound European, and is spelled with a ‘C’ in the English translation of the film’s official art book, I feel the Western spelling more clearly conveys the intended character of the name.
4. This is purely a matter of aesthetic perspective and opinion, of course, as there is traditionally little ethnic variation in anime characters – large eyes and simple features are a hallmark of the form across film and television (as well as manga), with variance due more to an artist’s individual style than anything else. Still, when one watches enough anime, certain patterns do start to emerge. It is common for artists to distinguish an ethnically Japanese character through black hair and flatter, less pronounced features, which is how Kiki stands out from, say, Tombo – whose freckles, large mouth, and wide jaw give him a slightly more Western look. Again, it is a matter of degrees, but as much of Kiki’s visual design is rooted in a sort of striking simplicity, whereas the characters of Corico are generally more obviously detailed, she clearly stands out from the crowd, and given the Japanese atmosphere of her hometown, assuming a Japanese (or, at least, non-Western) ethnicity for her seems fair.
5. Studio Ghibli, *The Art of Kiki’s Delivery Service*, trans. Yuji Oniki (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2006), 11.
6. *Ibid.*, 11-2.
7. Color is so important in illustrating the visual character and complexities of Corico that Studio Ghibli, which had always done its own meticulously detailed in-house color creation, developed 25 new colors for *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, bringing the total to what was then a Studio record of 465 colors (well over twice the amount used on television animation, for comparison), and veteran Ghibli staff member Michiyo Yasuda was given a new title of “Color Design” in recognition of the significant color innovations made on the film. The net effect is a greater sense of dynamism in the film’s setting, with the complex, mixed colors of buildings, roofs, streets, and windowsills evoking realistic, lived-in textures. *Ibid.*, 14, 17-8.

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8. Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation – Films, Themes, Artistry* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 144.
  9. Studio Ghibli, *The Art of Kiki*, 102.
  10. McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*, 144.
  11. What of Sweden? Why choose this space, among all European locations, as the primary visual inspiration for the film? The simple truth is that the city had always held special aesthetic interest for Miyazaki, who had first visited the city in the 1970s during his failed attempts to secure rights to adapt *Pippi Longstocking* for animation (McCarthy, Hayao Miyazaki, 144). That the cities of Visby and Stockholm bear certain visual characteristics of many locations from throughout the Western world, easily serving as signifier for a certain atmosphere of 20th-century Western architecture, certainly helps. But perhaps there is also something to be said for Sweden's neutral presence in World War II. As Corico is meant to exist as an idealized stand-in for a Europe that was, in this alternate reality, never ravaged by the war, Swedish cities are the best landmarks in all of Europe for what this idealized space might look like – the clearest real-world window for this alternate reality, and the best reference for Miyazaki and his animators to use in evoking it.
  12. Taken from a fan translation of the film's script, courtesy of the Hayao Miyazaki Discussion Group and the GhibliWiki at Nausicaa.net. As elaborated on in Note 16, no professional English translation of the film's Japanese dialogue and on-screen text is known to exist.
  13. Carol Ota, *The Relay of Gazes: Representations of Culture in the Japanese Televisual and Cinematic Experience* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 32.
  14. Ibid.
  15. Hayao Miyazaki, "Kiki – The Spirit and the Hopes of Contemporary Girls," in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 262.
  16. All dialogue quotes from the film in this chapter are derived from the English-language subtitle track on the 2012 "Studio Ghibli ga ippai (Collection)" Japanese Blu-Ray release. While this track is ostensibly a translation of the spoken Japanese dialogue, it is in truth a transcription of the film's first English-language dub, for Streamline Pictures. Pre-dating Disney's worldwide license on Ghibli's filmography, both *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *My Neighbor Totoro*, were dubbed into English by Streamline, at the request of Japanese distributor Tokuma Shoten, primarily for use on Japan Airlines flights. The *Kiki* dub was never given a home video release outside of an early

Japanese laserdisc, but the script for the dub was later given to Disney when they produced their own English-language track for the film, and has since been used as the primary English-language subtitle track for home video releases in Japan and North America – likely, in both cases, due to a mistaken belief that this was a literal English translation, rather than Streamline’s adaptation. In short, because of this reliance on the Streamline dub script, *Kiki’s Delivery Service* has never had a professional English-language translation released to the public. Instead, only the Streamline-based “Dubtitles” (in the fan parlance) have been employed, which presents a challenge when analyzing the original Japanese version of the film. It is not a wholly dire situation, as Streamline’s dub was largely accurate and took no major liberties; still, certain sentences elaborate or alter the original meaning, and on occasion, new words or phrases are introduced altogether (such as the “Oh the Humanity!” line during the dirigible crash, which is not present in Japanese). However, having compared the English-language quotes referenced here to their original Japanese, I have determined that the spirit of the dialogue is not meaningfully impacted, and have therefore elected to provide quotes from the ‘dubtitle’ track rather than venture my own translations.

17. Hayao Miyazaki, “I Wanted to Show the Various Faces of One Person in This Film,” in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 379.

18. *Ibid.*, 382.

19. Miyazaki has a different interpretation of Jiji’s vocal absence at the film’s end, one that is both amusingly literal and subtly insightful. In the 2013 documentary *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness* (Dir. Mami Sunada),

Miyazaki is asked about this very issue, and the following conversation ensues (translated by Taro Goto):

*Say, why couldn’t Jiji speak at the end?*

Miyazaki: Sometimes we become speechless. When they’re together at the end, there’s nothing to say.

*He didn’t say anything.*

Miyazaki: But he came, right?

*Yes, but...*

Miyazaki: What could he possibly say?

*Well, maybe that her magic is...*

Miyazaki: That her magic is back? Her magic deepened, you see. Would you prefer if Jiji said something like, “See what happens without me?” That’s annoying. You’d tell him to shut up. “When you gain, you also lose.” That sounds cool, right? Or “Quit talking with a cat!”

20. For example, in an interview given for the *Kiki’s Delivery Service* Roman Album, Miyazaki mused:

What is blood, though? It’s what we receive from our parents, isn’t it? It’s not something we learn to do. Talent is like that. We all have to pass through a period when we are unconsciously using a talent, while learning to consciously make that power our own. This is what Ursula says. She could paint, but what she thought was her own talent was actually something she inherited. This is the same for everyone. During our twenties, thirties, and forties we work to be able to understand our own abilities and limits, and ultimately find their level. Becoming unable to do something we were once able to do unconsciously means that it is

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also impossible to grow without becoming conscious of our talents and developing them. (Miyazaki, “I Wanted to Show,” 380.)

21. While prior Miyazaki movies had indulged the director’s love of flight with futuristic gliders, airborne castles, and rides on the backs of forest spirits, *Kiki’s Delivery Service* was the first to so directly engage with the minutiae and technical details of modern flight technology. Given how central this in-depth exploration of flight would be to future Miyazaki works – *Porco Rosso* and *The Wind Rises* in particular – this marks yet another way *Kiki* feels like a personal breakthrough for the director.

22. I do not personally consider Miyazaki to be an actively feminist filmmaker, even as he includes more female protagonists in his movies and treats them better than the vast majority of male directors around the world, but if there is one film of his I might pinpoint as having an active feminist undercurrent, it would probably be *Kiki*. The friendship with Ursula is significant, but more importantly, I find it powerful that no matter how many times Kiki sees other couples or carefree youths in the first half of the film, and no matter how much she might like to give up her journey and become one of them, she never does. Rather than give into the social pressure she so clearly feels and become the girl on the bike, being shown around town by a handsome boy, she ultimately chooses, over and over again, to be her own person, and chart her own path, and carve her own place for herself in this town. And because Kiki is so obviously intended to be a role model, an ideal modern youth who children of either gender can and should look up to, that feels like an undeniably progressive message.

23. Studio Ghibli, “The Art of Kiki,” 132; McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*, 147. In the art book, Miyazaki explains only that they got the print from a teacher at the school for the disabled. McCarthy elaborates that the painting was created by students and supervised by the instructor.

24. Studio Ghibli, “The Art of Kiki,” 132.

25. Miyazaki, “I Wanted to Show,” 381.

26. Hayao Miyazaki, “A Nation That Merely Dithers Around,” in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 147.





## Chapter Two: *Country Roads*

*Whisper of the Heart* and the search for home

*Personally, I was never more passionate about manga than when preparing for my college entrance exams. It's a period of life when young people appear to have a great deal of freedom, but are in many ways actually very oppressed. Just when they find themselves powerfully attracted to members of the opposite sex, they have to really crack the books. To escape from this depressing situation, they often find themselves wishing that they could live in a world of their own – a world they can say is truly theirs, a world unknown even to their parents ... I often refer to this feeling as one of yearning for a lost world. It's a sense that although you may currently be living in a world of constraints, if you were free from those constraints, you would be able to do all sorts of things.*

Hayao Miyazaki, 1979<sup>1</sup>

If *Kiki's Delivery Service* grabbed our attention by painting a vivid cinematic portrait of serenity,

*Whisper of the Heart* does so by expressing the overwhelming anonymity of modern urban life.

Fading in on a hazy sea of luminescence, the film opens with a macroscopic view of then-contemporary Tama, Tokyo, a mass of buildings and transportation that, while aesthetically pleasing, lacks in any warm, individual character. After several slow, panning shots of the city's nighttime grid, a hum of well-organized motion and lights, the sequence begins to move in closer, to the patterns of people and traffic at eye level, then further still to individuals at a train

station, in a suburban area slightly removed from the heart of the city – and then closer once more to a young woman walking out of a drug store. One senses a story could be told about any of the people we are glimpsing, and yet, almost arbitrarily, this is the person we happen to follow, on her way home, away from the city’s center, up into the hills overlooking the bustle below.

And atop it all, Olivia Newton-John’s 1973 cover of John Denver’s “Take Me Home, Country Roads” plays with aplomb.

The effect of the two opening sequences are similar – each depicts the story’s heroine emerging from her environment, a part of a larger whole, and each establishes the thematic and stylistic character of the film to come in succinct, immersive fashion. The difference is in the details, and the American pop music is the most important one of all. It is very self-consciously not the original version of the song – which, crucially, we never hear in the film – immediately, subconsciously introducing the idea of appropriation and covering, of one artist making something out of someone else’s work. Such forms of inspiration form a core tenant of creativity in the film. But it means much more than that playing over these introductory shots of nighttime Tokyo, the buzz of modern urban life contrasting starkly with the ‘country roads’ ideal of the song. How can one ‘go home,’ as the singer longs for, when the individual ‘home’ has been so displaced and decentralized through the rigors of urbanization and modernity? When protagonist Shizuku enters the picture, she emerges from utter anonymity, as any person whose story we follow in this large, bustling city inevitably must. For her, living in a large apartment complex within the world’s most populous metropolitan area, is there a ‘country roads’ ideal to lean back on for comfort? Can there be?

The stage is thusly set for the core question of the picture: How does one actualize oneself within the confines of a world one had no hand in creating? Just a few scenes from now, Shizuku will share with a friend a set of parody lyrics she created for the “Country Roads” song, titled “Concrete Roads.” “*Concrete Roads, everywhere,*” she sings. “*Cut down all the trees/Filled in the valleys/Western Tokyo, Tama Mountain/My hometown is concrete roads.*”<sup>2</sup> It is ostensibly a gag – one both Shizuku and her friend laugh at, and which the male lead of the film, Seiji, will make fun of later – but the lyrics resonate because there is a truth to them, a truth so deeply sublimated within these adolescents that it is easy for them to turn it into comedy. They have grown up in this world of ‘concrete roads,’ of natural settings being eroded by urbanization, of individual identity giving way to vast and imposing social structures, and unlike John Denver pining for the simple comforts of West Virginia, they have never known anything else. This is a world they had no role in forging, and given the rigid social template of contemporary life – school, college, work, etc. – it is unlikely they will have any power to shape it in the future. Even if they did, they would be one of many angling for influence – one dot in that imposing blur of lights that opens the film. How does one exist in such a world and become a self-fulfilled individual at the same time?

It is a natural extension of certain questions Miyazaki had been exploring throughout his career, and in *Kiki’s Delivery Service* especially, but *Whisper of the Heart* tackles such issues with remarkably direct clarity, all the fantasy that touched or defined the director’s earlier (and later) works absent in this grounded, contemporary portrait of creativity in action. Perhaps Miyazaki felt free to do so when working solely as storyteller, for while he wrote, storyboarded, and produced *Whisper of the Heart*, directorial duties went to Yoshifumi Kondo, a younger<sup>3</sup> artist who had held prominent positions at the studio going back to Isao Takahata’s *Grave of the*

*Fireflies*, and had worked alongside Miyazaki and Takahata in television animation for years before the studio's founding.<sup>4</sup> *Whisper of the Heart* would be the first film on which Miyazaki ceded direction to a younger staff member, but it would not be the last, and the integration of complex, contemporary ideas with simple, minimalist narratives would be a common theme of latter films with similar production set-ups – namely *From Up on Poppy Hill* and *The Borrower Arrietty* (2010; Dir. Hiromasa Yonebayashi). Miyazaki's intellectual and artistic hand is strongly apparent in these films, and especially in *Whisper of the Heart* – building clearly from the thematic foundation of *Kiki's Delivery Service*, it is a natural evolution in the narrative arc of his career – so while they are not part of his directorial filmography, it is still important to consider them as part of Miyazaki's overall canon.

That being said, Kondo's role in the creation of *Whisper of the Heart* cannot be ignored, for although the storytelling is characteristically Miyazaki from top to bottom, the unique aesthetic dimension and energy Kondo gifts the film makes it one of the brightest, if lesser-known, gems of Ghibli's catalogue. While Kondo had worked prominently on Miyazaki films before – he was a Supervising Animator<sup>5</sup> on *Kiki's Delivery Service* and did key animation<sup>6</sup> on *Porco Rosso* – he primarily worked with Isao Takahata at the studio, supervising animation and serving as character designer on both *Grave of the Fireflies* and *Only Yesterday*. Takahata's films – these two in particular – are rooted in reality and deal with more obviously adult themes than Miyazaki's works, and since Kondo was one of the primary architects of their visual style,<sup>7</sup> he was a perfect match for *Whisper of the Heart*, bringing a sharp eye for real-world detail and palpable empathy for everyday emotions, characteristic of Takahata's work, to Miyazaki's story.

For instance, Kondo has an incredible eye for how suburban Tokyo settings exist within (or intrude upon, depending on one's point of view) nature. Trees, grass, and general greenery

are simply bursting at the edges of nearly every frame in the film, overwhelming the majority of outdoor shots – where each image is clearly weighted towards the strong, vivid greens, standing out against the muted palettes of human characters and buildings – and even intruding upon indoor spaces. In Shizuku’s school, primarily composed of brown, oaky tones, the greenery still feels prominent whenever a shot includes a window; rather than just animate a few trees outside them (as Miyazaki indicates in the storyboards), Kondo gives the window-framed trees a soft, atmospheric luminescence, our attention drawn to their mysterious glow even indoors.

Characters rarely comment on it, but they are surrounded by the natural world; their seeming ignorance of it conveys urban modernity as more of a pathology than a hard, aesthetic truth of the world. The natural environment intrudes always; one need only pay attention to become in touch with it, as Shizuku will as part of her creative awakening in the second half of the film.



Or consider the little details, sprinkled throughout the film, that subtly bring larger issues to light. Shizuku’s family’s apartment is filled with books, for example, and yet her parents and older sister are only ever seen working at the shared laptop. Coupled with the library’s transition to electronic filing at the start of the story (Shizuku prefers the name cards for the personal touch they provide), the intrusion of technology – and its potential for increasing the anonymity of the modern world through further decentralization of human experience – quietly becomes a theme of the picture (it is not insignificant that Shizuku chooses to write her story by hand).

Globalization is a major theme from the opening frame onwards, but always in understated ways;

the playing of an American country classic over images of metropolitan Japan, for instance, immediately creates a confusion of cultural identity, a notion expressed perhaps even more powerfully in a fleeting shot of a Coke can in the dirt as Shizuku pursues the mysterious cat across town. Recalling the similarly economic use of Coca-Cola imagery as a symbol of American influence in Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949), where Setsuko Hara rides her bike past a prominent Coca-Cola sign on the side of the road, the image – one of the very few in the film without a trace of greenery, speaking to the corruptive nature of what the can represents – helps illustrate a modern Japan in which global influence is capable of overpowering or diluting local character, further compounding the repressive de-individualization of modern life on scales both cultural and personal.



*Whisper of the Heart*



*Late Spring* (1949; Dir. Yasujiro Ozu)

The “Concrete Roads” song Shizuku writes is thus an expression of her life’s repressive qualities. Where John Denver had a natural, unsullied ‘home’ to dream and sing of, an idealized space that probably never existed but nevertheless has a tangible emotional resonance, Shizuku belongs to a generation that arrived after the ‘country roads’ were turned into concrete, when the ‘hometown’ ideal had already given way to the de-personalization of modernity. The mere presence of a hokey American country tune like “Country Roads” in her life demonstrates the sort of anonymous, non-specific transnational atmosphere in which Shizuku has been raised.<sup>8</sup>

That Shizuku cannot connect with the original lyrics outright, trying first to translate them straight only to feel they are “trite,” speaks to the difficulty of finding a tangible point of connection – let alone a sense of identity – with modern global culture. This is not a repression Shizuku seems overly conscious of, yet when she chooses to create something, like the original lyrics of “Concrete Roads,” the ideas flow freely into her work.

In this way, the repression of modern life is her starting point in this story. And while *Whisper of the Heart*, like *Kiki's Delivery Service*, is not a narratively rigorous film, it does adhere to a sort of ‘emotional’ three-act structure, wherein Shizuku moves through three distinct phases of attitude and outlook, each signified by the three “Country Roads” adaptations Shizuku writes and shares over the course of the film. Starting with “Concrete Roads” as an expression of her repressive non-direction in life, on to the second “Country Roads” variant embodying her brief but crucial depressive state, and finally to the full adapted version she performs with Seiji and his family – a clear awakening of creative infatuation and drive – this emotional three-act structure is the journey by which Shizuku achieves true self-actualization by the film’s end.

The first ‘act’ is defined by a sort of aimlessness, a subliminal unrest that fuels Shizuku’s early creative wanderings and that comes across in the uneasy humor of her “Concrete Roads” song. From the beginning, she is shown to already possess many of the tenants of a creative spirit outlined in *Kiki's Delivery Service* – a friendly, extroverted personality, a comfort with and among her peers, and a strong independent drive fueled by a clear creative passion. Early in the film, we learn that she has spent her summer break reading voraciously, devouring as much storytelling as she can from as many different authors as she can find. She obviously revels in creative expression, and has reached a point, as all young artists do, where the creativity one has been consuming begins boiling over, forcing one to start dabbling with creativity oneself.

Shizuku does this through her lyrics translations and adaptations. It is a humble beginning, as such things usually are, and the concept of infusing one's personal feelings or ideas into someone else's work of art is a relatable experience for fledgling artists; inspiration and creation tend to exist a very short distance apart when one first starts out.

Most importantly, Shizuku has a creative, inquisitive impulse, as seen in the early sequence where she meets a mysterious cat on the train, and rather than continue with her intended trip to the library, follows the cat to see where it goes. It feels "like the start of a story," she remarks, demonstrating the sort of creative spontaneity, the impulse to follow something for no logical reason other than to see where it may lead, that all artists need – creativity cannot exist without one's willingness to get swept up in it. And like all creative journeys worth embarking on, this one proves positively intoxicating.

The sequence is quite long, following Shizuku off the train, through the bustle and traffic of city streets, into some suburbs, over walls, up slopes, through alleyways (this is where the aforementioned Coke can appears), and finally into the high, Tama hills overlooking the city. All the while, the amount of greenery in the image grows and grows; it is ever-present, even in the city where trees have been planted along medians and sidewalks, but the further away from the center she travels, the more natural beauty seems to overwhelm things, houses and human structures existing between and among trees, not the other way around. The anonymity of the city gives way to the ethereal allure of a more natural setting, further enthralling both Shizuku and the viewer with each step of the journey.

"I never knew there was a place like this way up here," Shizuku says. The discovery is both inspiring and profound, especially considering that it has led her to the beautiful antique shop that will serve as a cornerstone throughout her arc (as in *Kiki's Delivery Service*,



happenstance plays a major role in creative or individual awakening). It is the sort of place a person like Shizuku can absolutely revel in, an aesthetically pleasing and creatively encouraging sort of space, filled to the brim with gorgeous art – for Shizuku, walking into the antique shop is like Kiki entering Ursula’s cabin and seeing the painting, only there are many more types of work on display here – and allowing the art that is the natural world to shine through via plants and exterior lighting.

Elderly shop owner Mr. Nishi, meanwhile, is not only kind and encouraging, happy to humor Shizuku’s fascination with “the Baron” – an antique cat figurine that draws Shizuku’s attention, and will fuel her creativity later on – and to give her a demonstration of the wondrously elaborate cuckoo clock he is fixing. With its visually mesmerizing dwarven mine and automated figures, the clock is stunning, as is the animation used to evoke it, creating a genuine sense of awe in both Shizuku and the viewer. Yet what resonates most powerfully about the moment is not the clock itself, but Shizuku’s expression of wonder at it, a universal sensation of having one’s horizons widened by a stupendous piece of art, feeling an inspiration and power one can barely describe. R.W. Hepburn describes the feeling of ‘wonder,’ in its truest and most stable form, as stemming from “a sense of absolute contingency,” where the object of one’s awe “is the sheer existence of a world,” all reasons falling away in a kind of reverie that is not a “prelude to fuller knowledge,” but an ecstasy for an object’s sheer existence.<sup>9</sup> This is the kind of amazement art can instill in us, and being open to that experience of wonder in one’s life is essential in accessing one’s creative spirit. Shizuku is this kind of person, and like many moments in *Whisper of the Heart*, her discovery of the antique shop, and reaction to the clock in particular, takes the creative viewer back to a time when his or her creativity was blossoming, and helps to reconnect with those formative emotions and experiences.



Yet there remains the question of what Shizuku is to do with all this latent creative energy she has inside her. Reading books, chasing cats, and discovering wondrous places are all meaningful experiences, but to what end is any of this going towards? What end can it go towards? This is the subtext of “Concrete Roads” – the roads have not just been ‘paved over,’ but been made literally concrete, rigid and immovable, by the repressions of modern life. A large, densely populated city space that renders the natural environment distant and the individual anonymous, an increasingly intrusive global culture, and an education system with lots of structure, many tests, and little room for personal expression – these are the ‘concrete roads’ of modern Japanese life Shizuku is subliminally bound by, the forces that work to render her creative impulses aimless, and which prevent her, at least initially, from feeling fully at home in her surroundings, or wholly actualized as an individual.

Inevitably, a depressive state must set in if these thoughts move from unconscious to conscious space, and Shizuku’s second “Country Roads” adaptation, shared with her friends in a club at school, signals this movement and symbolizes the second act in the film’s emotional structure. Right away, it is clear more elements of her life have started seeping into her lyrics. The first part seems fairly simple and innocuous – “*Country road, this old road/If go right to the end/‘Got a feeling it’ll take me/To that town, country road*” – but where the original Denver version was about traveling to a well-known place of nostalgia, Shizuku has altered the meaning

to reflect exploration and uncertainty (later in the film, the “town” she refers to will take on a more abstract meaning, a symbol of internal strength rather than external comfort). “I don’t know about old hometowns,” she explains to her friends, “so I wrote about what I feel.” And those feelings are most apparent in a set of lyrics buried deeper in the song, read aloud by her friends: *“I left because I was alone and I had nothing/Pushed away my sadness and pretended I was strong.”* The impulse to explore, coupled with a desire to leave, feelings of loneliness and sadness masked by an exterior visage of strength – these are the sensations Shizuku is grappling with, a further expression of how constrained she feels by life, as if she is stuck and has little room to move.

It is an emotionally nebulous series of events that sends Shizuku back to the antique shop near the film’s midway point, sad and lonely and openly vulnerable about her complex feelings for the first time. The direct catalyst is Shizuku’s confrontation with male classmate Sugimura about his obliviousness as to her friend Yuko’s feelings for him – discovering that Sugimura actually cares for Shizuku herself, she feels “dense” and careless, her faith in her own emotions shaken – but the sequence that follows is in truth cumulative of everything we have glimpsed of the character thus far, her creative energy finally hitting the brick wall hinted at in her song lyrics.

In a powerful moment startling for its raw emotional qualities and stark, quiet atmosphere, the spaces between Shizuku’s words conveying more than speech itself, Shizuku encounters the cat she met and followed earlier on the front step of the shop – which, unlike last time, is closed and uninviting – prompting her to confess her feelings to what she believes is a kindred spirit.

Hi. Have you been shut out too? Do you live here? Are you hungry? You’re not very nice. Just like me. Why do we change, I wonder? I was always so sweet. Books don’t

even excite me like they used to. There's always someone inside me saying, 'Things aren't that easy!' I'm not very nice...

This is the only point in the film thus far where Shizuku outwardly expresses sadness, or directly gives voice to the emotional confliction we have glimpsed in the gap between her songwriting and her cheerful exterior personality. Yet it feels exactly right the moment she says it, painfully honest and piercingly insightful, not only because Kondo and Miyazaki have carefully illustrated how a creatively driven girl like Shizuku might feel constrained by the repressions of modernity, but because these are utterly universal adolescent emotions. The connection with a lonely, "shut-out" animal, the confusion over internal changes, the anxiety that life cannot remain simple, and that one's preexisting passions will not be good enough on the path to adulthood are all feelings that can hit us at any time when we are young. They are especially palpable when one is on the cusp of something – Shizuku is taking her high-school entrance exams – and yet senses an internal stagnation or lack of fulfillment. Shizuku's 'depressive' state is a very brief part of the film – encapsulated, in essence, in this one fleeting sequence – and yet it is so crucial in moving her (and the audience) along the path towards creative awakening, as if one must hit an internal low point before one can truly discover the passion necessary for creation.

That awakening is heralded by the arrival of classmate Seiji to the antique shop, where his creative passions will collide with Shizuku's in a poignant and profound way. Seiji has been a mysterious, aloof character up until now, caught in glimpses as an intimidating, condescending presence and sensed invisibly as the name shared on all the library cards in the books Shizuku has been reading (though the connection shall not be made until later). Although nothing Seiji has done thus far is particularly rude or hurtful if we consider his actions outside of Shizuku's point of view – he lightly mocks Shizuku's "Concrete Road" lyrics upon returning her notebook

to her, pokes fun at her forgetfulness when she accidentally leaves her bag at the antique shop on her first visit, and seems a little standoffish in school – it is common theme in Miyazaki films for an adolescent protagonist to perceive certain actions of their peers as something more harmful or personal than they really are, just as Kiki does with the elitist witch or Tombo and the other children in *Kiki's Delivery Service*. It is basic adolescent nature to do so with strangers – human nature, probably – and just as Tombo came into focus as an actual person for both Kiki and the audience when he demonstrated his passion for flight, Seiji will be humanized when Shizuku learns of his artistic passion.

That Seiji is the grandson of the kindly old antique shop owner, and thus has a strong connection to this place where wonder resides – a wonder of ‘absolute contingency,’ where one can revel in the mere existence of artistry – certainly makes him more approachable to Shizuku, who feels more emotionally at home here than anywhere else. But what really allows them to connect as people is Seiji’s talent for violin making, his studio in the basement of the shop filled with gorgeous instruments, some of which he has crafted himself. “Wow! You made this?” Shizuku exclaims upon seeing one of Seiji’s violins. “It’s like magic.” As before, she is prone to revel in the art of others, and just as in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, Miyazaki deliberately depicts multiple forms of artistry, never confining creativity to one category or medium, but striving to illustrate it as a multi-faceted mode of expression. There really is something magical to it, just as there is a magical quality perpetually nestled among the realist aesthetics of the film; from the integration of nature in the visuals, to moments like Shizuku serendipitously finding the antique shop or seeing the Baron’s eyes shine magnificently in the light, *Whisper of the Heart* illustrates a kind of understated ‘magic’ inherent to our world, one that the pressures and noise of modern

life cannot quell, and that emboldens and inspires us when we are able to quiet ourselves and listen for it.<sup>10</sup>

That magic feels most palpable in the sequence that follows, as Shizuku asks Seiji to play his violin, he demands that she sing with him, and they then launch into a performance of “Country Roads,” with Shizuku providing her own full set of lyrics for the first time. As they begin to play and sing together, Shizuku lighting up with passion and enthusiasm to a degree we have not yet seen, Mr. Nishi and several of his friends arrive back at the store; hearing Shizuku and Seiji playing below, they quietly come downstairs, grab instruments of their own – standup bass, tambourine, lute, and recorder – and join in. The effect is magnificent. Not only is the animation genuinely breathtaking – even live-action films rarely synchronize the audio and physical motion of instrumental performance this seamlessly, or with such a careful eye for how musicians hold themselves while playing – but there is an all-consuming atmosphere of joy to the sequence, the intoxicating sensation of people coming together to make art, to have fun and express themselves creatively. The impromptu performance happens entirely without words, music acting as a force that draws these people together, that forms a union between them before they ever introduce themselves to one another.<sup>11</sup>



Little wonder, then, that the sequence prompts a genuine creative awakening in Shizuku, as reflected in the third (and first full) set of original lyrics she sings on the spot. Of course, she

must have written these words beforehand to have something ready to sing, but even if all the feelings they embody had been buried in her subconscious beforehand, seeping into her writing as they did in the prior two adaptations, they could not have fully meant something to her until this moment, at this crossroads in her life when she feels sad and powerless, and is then, in an instance of pure creative expression, introduced to the profoundly liberating power of artistry for the first time. The moment itself charts a path forward, as do the lyrics:

*Had a dream of living on my own  
With no fear of being all alone  
Pushed my sadness down inside of me  
And pretended I was strong as I could be*

*Country road, this old road  
If you go right to the end  
Got a feeling it'll take me  
To that town, country road*

*It doesn't matter to me how sad I might be  
I will never ever let a tear show in my eye  
If my feet are moving faster  
That's only because I want to push away memories*

*Country road, this old road  
Could go right to my hometown  
I won't go there, I can't go there  
Can't go down that country road*

*Country road, when tomorrow comes  
I'll be like I always am  
Want to go back there, can't go back there  
Fare thee well, country road*

Where John Denver's song was the musical epitome of modern conceptions of nostalgia, Shizuku's is a near-total thematic inverse, reflecting not a perfect, idealized world where one draws strength and comfort from one's home, but an emotional state in which holding onto one's past is dangerous and limiting. Shizuku acknowledges all the insecurities and negative feelings we have glimpsed in her so far – the fear of loneliness, the repression of sadness and discomfort

– but rather than turn to the ‘country roads’ ideal as a path to healing, she rejects it entirely. “I won’t go there,” she sings of the country road’s potential for taking her ‘home.’ “I *can’t* go there.” To do so would be to mire herself in complacency, and not actually confront the source of her sadness or anxiety. It is another universal emotional conundrum, a contemplation about being stuck between where one is and where one wants to be, without even really knowing where one’s destination is. In times of stress or uncertainty, who has not longed to return ‘home,’ to retreat into childhood, to stay with what is comfortable or familiar? But one cannot “go back there,” because the only way to find oneself is to move forward and work towards the future – because the idealized ‘home’ Denver sings of no longer exists, if it ever did, and an individual must find what constitutes ‘home’ within oneself. At the song’s end, Shizuku pledges to do just this by bidding the country road farewell – “Sayounara” in the original Japanese, a much more emphatic, permanent goodbye than the translation implies.

While this sequence is, in many ways, the culmination of Shizuku’s emotional arc – a signal of the third and final ‘act,’ the last step on her path towards self-actualization – it is only the beginning of her hard work, and it is at this point that Miyazaki and Kondo begin digging deep into the meaning and nature of creativity. Singing with Seiji and his family serves as an awakening for Shizuku, but the actual path forward does not become clear until the next day, when Seiji informs her that he is following his dreams by travelling to Italy for a month to try a Violin-making apprenticeship. Inspired by both Seiji’s creativity and his motivation to apply it, Shizuku decides to do the same. “He’s going to find out if he has talent. Well, so will I!” Shizuku declares to Yuko. “I’ll write a story. There’s one I want to write. If he can do it, so will I! ... I feel empowered!” For the first time in the film, Shizuku feels as if she has actual agency; consciously putting her creative spirit in action gives her a power she has not felt before. That



evening, she rushes straight home to her desk and begins writing profusely, a kind of immediate creative outpouring one cannot help but admire, or to long for oneself.<sup>12</sup>

As in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, where Kiki has been sent out into the world to see if she can establish herself in a town as a full-fledged witch, the idea of the individual 'trial' as a path to self-actualization is present in *Whisper of the Heart* as well. Only here, it is entirely self-motivated, with Shizuku testing herself, as Seiji is being tested in Italy, to see if her creativity will lead somewhere. And as in *Kiki*, Shizuku needs a person she can rely on during these trials, someone whose trust and encouragement she can use as a beacon. The baker Osono served this function for Kiki, showing kindness but also holding Kiki to a certain personal standard, while in *Whisper of the Heart*, this role is served by Mr. Nishi, the antique shop owner, who not only agrees to read Shizuku's story when it is finished – giving her a clear goal to work towards and the gift of a receptive audience, which makes all the difference in the world when one strives to create something – but also seems to intimately understand Shizuku's feelings and ambitions.

"You and Seiji are like this stone," Nishi explains to Shizuku, showing her a piece of mica slate he has in the shop. An ordinary rock at first glance, the slate has a small crack in it through which shines a violent green gemstone, beryl, its light dancing across Shizuku's face as Nishi shows it to her. "Rough, unpolished, still natural," he continues. "I like stones that way. But making violins or writing stories is different. The rough stone is inside you. You have to find it and polish it. It takes time and effort." His obvious gift for metaphor aside, what Nishi provides Shizuku by showing her the rock is a sense of perspective – an acknowledgement of the possibility that exists inside her, but also a reminder that she need not be perfect at this point in her life, and that the process of creativity is an ongoing internal search. The lesson solidifies Shizuku's resolve. "I'm scared," she says. "What if there isn't a beautiful crystal inside of me?"

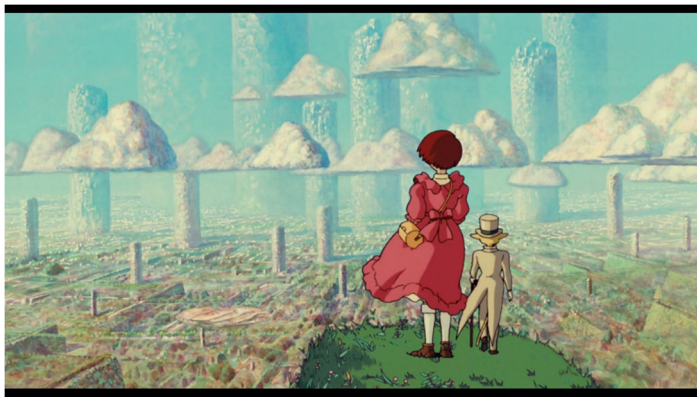
But I want to write. You'll be the first person to see it." It is another very honest moment, an expression of the angst and fear that inevitably comes with creativity, but also of the drive one must have to push pass it forcibly, if one's art can ever truly flourish.

And flourish it does, as Shizuku rushes home excitedly from the antique shop, and on the way launches into the first of three fantasy sequences in which Shizuku imagines herself as the heroine of her story, inserting herself into a gorgeous fantasy landscape where she has adventures with a life-size version of the Baron. Based on designs by artist Naohisa Inoue, the visuals in these sequences – vast in scope, richly detailed and painterly, bursting with color and dynamic, playful lighting – is rooted in works depicting the imaginary world of *Iblard* (pronounced, according to Inoue's website, "e-ballade"), the series for which Inoue's art is most famous.<sup>13</sup> Miyazaki had been a fan for years before the production of *Whisper of the Heart*, fond of the idea of looking "through *Iblard eyes*," a way of perceiving the world so that "even the huge sky scrapers and millions of train lines in Japan become a beautiful scene..."<sup>14</sup> The appropriation of Inoue's world of *Iblard* for Shizuku's fantasy space therefore not only grants the film a striking new aesthetic dimension – one that portrays Shizuku's imagination as something substantial – but works in thematic harmony with the film's basic conceptions of creativity. As Inoue explains, the world of *Iblard* is as much a philosophy or way of seeing the world as it is an art style:

...Have you ever faced a beautiful landscape in the country-side, or perhaps even in a city, a landscape which you thought was so beautiful that it was in some ways 'out of this world?' That could have been a scene from *Iblard*. It could have been a beautiful sun set, or an extraordinary tree, anything can open your personal door to *Iblard*. Or perhaps there is a place you have always dreamed of, a place that doesn't exist in this world, but which would have been great fun if it DID exist. Anything your heart desires can be seen in *Iblard* and everyone opens their own door to this eternal land. When you see something that pleases your eye, that is YOUR entrance to *Iblard* whether it be a precious stone, pretty clouds, or a beautiful field. Thus *Iblard* can in some ways become a mirror

reflection of our heart's desires, the landscape in *Iblard* can change according to our desires, the trains in *Iblard* (known as *Siema*) move according to where we want to go.<sup>15</sup>

In the lyrical transitions between reality and Shizuku's fantasy sequences – where Shizuku and the Baron soaring through the clouds of Iblard smoothly transforms back into Shizuku running down the steep staircase from atop the Tama hills – it is clear that Shizuku sees the world through 'Iblard eyes' as well. In truth, it is a fundamental ability for all artists; being able to find inspiration in one's surroundings and have an imaginative view of the natural world fuels creativity of all types. So while the actual narrative content of Shizuku's fantasies is more or less nonsensical, the way she weaves in objects and visuals from the world around her – in the first sequence, she and the Baron go searching for lapis lazuli, and later on, she seeks beryl in gemstone caverns – illustrates how she has the passion necessary for true creative thinking, all the artistic qualities we glimpsed in her earlier – her creatively inquisitive impulse, her ability to imbue her personality into her writing, her gift for internalizing that which inspires her, be it a book or the natural world – coming back to serve her well as she embarks on this artistic journey.



Shizuku's fantasy in *Whisper of the Heart*



*Borrowed Garden* by Naohisa Inoue

As these fantasy sequences suggest, creativity becomes all-consuming for Shizuku, to the point that she starts ignoring her academic studies in favor of writing. Interestingly, the film does not present this as an irresponsible action, but as a crucial or even honorable one for someone

trying to assert themselves as an individual. Education, after all, is one of the repressive forces that contributes to the crushing anonymity outlined at the start of the film. "...Cramming too much into young children is harmful," Miyazaki explained in 1996. "I don't like to study, so I don't want to say people should study. But I do suggest you study things you like. It's just hard to find the right entry point to find what you like. This is why it would be good if schools could offer this entry point."<sup>16</sup> But education, as a one-size-fits-all approach to raising children, doesn't typically provide such avenues. It is part of why people can feel lost in the modern world; the set social routine of spending many years in school, then moving on to college, before one can finally enter the 'real' world and assert oneself as an individual is a restrictive one, and provides little room for actually honing one's passions. Shizuku's choice to focus on her creative project over her high school entrance exams may seem irresponsible when viewed in the context of the social template, but the film argues it is the right decision in her development as an individual. "Not everyone has to be the same," says Shizuku's father when she explains why she is neglecting her studies. Rather than punish her, he recognizes how important this is, and allows her to continue – while stressing that there may be difficulties ahead. "It's not easy when you walk your own road. You've only got yourself to blame." It is a tough but fair thing to say. The modern world is not laid out for young people to strike their own paths – yet if it is something Shizuku can successfully manage to do, she will be stronger for it in the end.

When Shizuku finally finishes her story, after several weeks of nonstop work, she brings it straight to Mr. Nishi and demands he read it on the spot, in a sequence that beautifully encapsulates the anxiety one feels when sharing one's work with another. While he reads, Shizuku waits on the back deck, overlooking the city below. When she first looked out upon this vista, alongside Seiji just before he showed her the violin studio and her personal trial began, she

proclaimed: “It’s like we’re in the sky!” It filled her with ecstasy. Now, at the other end of this journey, she gazes out upon the city once more, the horizon stretching as far as one can see in all directions, with an uneasy expression on her face, her hands trembling slightly. Perhaps she wonders if she has done this crucial bit of inspiration justice.

Dusk turns to night, in a series of three still frames reminiscent of Ozu’s “pillow shots,”<sup>17</sup> highlighting key visual attributes of Japanese modernity – a busy intersection, the city horizon with a train running through it, an airplane soaring through the calm night air. When Mr. Nishi comes back to pass judgment on her story, will Shizuku have truly established herself amidst this anonymity, or sunken into it deeper?



*‘Pillow’ shots*

Finally, Nishi returns, opening the door to literally shine a light on the dozing Shizuku, her head buried in her arms as if frozen in anxiety. “Thank you,” he tells her. “It’s very good.” But this bit of praise is only an opportunity for Shizuku to let her anxieties burst forth. “Say what you really think!” she cries, framed by the lights of the city below. “I couldn’t write what I wanted! The last half doesn’t make sense. I know that!” The look of desperation on her face is palpable, her eyes glistening in the light with simultaneous apprehension and determination. But Nishi was the right mentor on this journey for a reason, and he finds a way to give her perspective on her accomplishment, without belittling her concerns. “Yes,” he says, smiling comfortingly, framed by the doorway with Seiji’s violins in the background. “It’s rough, blunt, unfinished, just like Seiji’s violin. You’ve shown me the rough stone you’ve just cut out of the

rock. You've worked hard. You're wonderful." Shizuku's eyes widen, her body momentarily rigid with astonishment, before bursting into tears, overwhelmed by the culmination – and, more importantly, affirmation – of her emotional journey. As Nishi says, it is her potential that matters most, the effort and motivation she put into her work that proves she has a strong, sustainable creativity within her; that Nishi can recognize and convey this to her is a gift in and of itself.

And in turn, Shizuku's story also offers a gift to Nishi, who reveals to Shizuku that the Baron figurine she has been so infatuated with is actually a relic of a great love Nishi had long ago, before the war, symbolic of both her existence and her loss. "Your story brought the Baron out of my memory and back to life," he explains. His words probably mean more than Shizuku can even understand at this point in her life. For another person to express, even in simple terms, that they were deeply touched by her writing, "rough" and "unpolished" as it may be, means the world. It is a considerable accomplishment.

In the final scene of the film, Seiji returns from Italy, and he and Shizuku venture up to a high point overlooking the city at dawn, mist blanketing it like the sea before a breathtaking sunrise breaks through the clouds. "I'm glad I pushed myself," Shizuku declares. "I understand myself better now. I'm going to study hard and go to high school." It is a lovely denouement to her story, for while we cannot know if Shizuku will be an artist or writer in her future, it is clear in this moment that she will undoubtedly be stronger for having made this effort. Even if she stays more closely within the boundaries of the social template from now on, continuing with high school and college and so forth, she will do so with a better, greater awareness and understanding of who she is, and how she fits into the world around her as an individual, rather than an anonymous, powerless dot in the blur of city lights. By pursuing creativity, she has solved the core conundrum of the film. This may not be the world she chose, or one she had any

hand in creating, but she has actualized herself within its boundaries all the same. And on the minor scale *Whisper of the Heart* operates on, that is a major victory indeed.

Had the film ended on this simple moment of cumulative sentiment, perhaps with another gaze out upon the Tama horizon, it might well have been perfect. Instead, *Whisper of the Heart* throws a bit of an abrupt curveball in its final seconds, with Seiji proposing marriage to Shizuku – for some indeterminate date many years in the future – and Shizuku accepting happily. It is not necessarily out of keeping with the themes of the film, or even of their relationship, but the abruptness of the scene, and the rather enormous implications of what Seiji is asking, never fails to raise an eyebrow among viewers.<sup>18</sup> It feels like an overly clean, inorganically convenient classical Hollywood-style ending, which is ironic, given how hard Shizuku has worked in the film to find identity amidst the repressions of global culture.

Perhaps what is most troubling about the proposal is that it makes an already existing gender imbalance in the film more prominent than it needs to be, and limits some of the power of Shizuku's arc. Seiji's character is one of Shizuku's primary motivators throughout the film, her commitment to chase her creativity the same way Seiji does pushing her forward at every turn. And while there is room for that dynamic to be problematic – the slightly older male character serving as an ideal and beacon for the younger female – it mostly plays out without issue, both because Shizuku is such a strong, vibrant, and independent character throughout, and because the story is consistently told on her terms. Just minutes before the proposal, for instance, she even declares she is “no man's burden” when Seiji tries to ride her up a hill on his bicycle (Shizuku refuses, jumping off to help him push). Shizuku does take plenty of inspiration from Seiji, but as she resolutely refuses to ever play second-fiddle to him (pun not intended), the dynamic creates no subservience or lack of strength on her part.

So while the basic thematic intent of the proposal makes sense in a vacuum – Shizuku and Seiji’s relationship is one of each person pushing the other to be better, and marriage is a permanent extension of that existing commitment – the careful cultivation of Shizuku’s point-of-view and agency seems lessened when the film ends with Seiji proposing a path for her future, binding her to himself for what may be the rest of their lives. Shizuku could refuse, of course (and the logic that leads her to declare “it’s exactly what I wanted,” given that her infatuation with Seiji has only had slight hints of romance up until now, is nebulous at best), but where her future seemed broad and open and limitless only seconds before, standing on the hill as the sun rose over the city, her path suddenly feels overly constrained, as mired in a restrictive social template as she was at the start of the film. Shizuku’s progress is not necessarily reversed, but with the power in the relationship returned so suddenly to Seiji – who registers more as a symbol than a flesh-and-blood character in the film – the ending rings hollow and underdeveloped in a way no other part of the film does.<sup>19</sup>

It is a shame, albeit one of relatively limited consequence, for outside of that abrupt ending, *Whisper of the Heart* is a tremendous achievement of animation, one that uses this typically stylized and fanciful medium to dig as deeply as possible into the emotional dimensions of the modern adolescent experience. Though its story is specific to domestic Japanese issues and anxieties, the film’s poignant insight into the process of self-actualization gives it a potential resonance for young people the world over; and as an inspiring, elegant statement on the liberating power of creativity, it offers plenty of lessons to adults as well, especially those with strong artistic passions. Amidst its deceptive simplicity, the film is positively life-affirming.

That Yoshifumi Kondo died only a few years after the release of *Whisper of the Heart* – in 1998, at the age of 47, from an aneurism often suspected to be due to overwork<sup>20</sup> – is a tragedy



that still stings Ghibli fans to this day. Imagine what works he could have produced by now were he still with us, having started from such an absurdly high level as this. His passing has also left a lasting impact upon the studio. By the time *Whisper of the Heart* was released, fans and critics already considered him the “heir apparent to the Studio Ghibli tradition,” and interviews from the period indicate Miyazaki’s intention to slow the pace of his own work in preparation for a possible retirement (Takahata, of similar age and generation to Miyazaki, was likely considering the same).<sup>21</sup> Kondo’s death changed all of that. Suddenly, there was no proven, tested younger staff member who could feasibly direct films in Miyazaki and Takahata’s absence, and for a number of years, that also meant that the studio neglected to produce any of the stirring true-to-life narratives they had started making in the 1990s (especially once Takahata moved into a more experimental and stylized phase of his work). While Ghibli has started trusting younger directors with feature films again in recent years – Hiromasa Yonebayashi being the most promising, having directed the stupendous *The Borrower Arrietty* and being the first Ghibli director after Miyazaki and Takahata to write and storyboard his own film with *When Marnie Was There* (2014) – current discussions about potentially closing the studio’s feature film department in the wake of Miyazaki and Takahata’s actual retirements are rooted in the company’s inability to groom a younger generation of animators.<sup>22</sup> Kondo was, in many ways, the future of the studio, and it is possible that its potential longevity died with him.

If *Whisper of the Heart* represents an unfulfilled turning point for the studio, it was nevertheless a very literal evolution for Miyazaki’s artistry, a major progression not only in his thoughts on creativity, but on the directness with which he tackled complex themes of how human beings learn to live a fulfilling life – an impossibly broad theme that has nevertheless formed the thematic cornerstone of Miyazaki’s career. Miyazaki has on several occasions drawn

comparisons between *Whisper of the Heart* and his subsequent film, *Princess Mononoke*, saying that they “stand on the same foundation.”<sup>23</sup> As Miyazaki elaborates:

*Whisper of the Heart* was made with a clear line demarking what can be said and what we decided not to touch upon. What is in *Princess Mononoke* is what we hadn’t touched upon then. When people surrounded by paved roads wonder how they should live, I don’t think there is a markedly new way to live. There is only the classic way we have always lived. I wanted to point out that living that way is fine, and to cheer on the people living that way. And I wanted to show that the world we are living in is this sort of world. The historic order may be reversed, but both *Whisper of the Heart* and *Princess Mononoke* were made with that thought in mind.<sup>24</sup>

In this way, *Whisper of the Heart* is as significant to Miyazaki’s future works as *Kiki’s Delivery Service* was. That creative reflection is the key common factor between the two films is no coincidence. Reflexive consideration of the creative process is present in few Miyazaki films, yet it consistently fuels the director’s thematic maturation. *Kiki* was a turning point because it brought the complex themes of his early fantasies to a more direct, emotionally realist level, thus clarifying many key ideas for future development, and *Whisper of the Heart* did this on an even greater level, asking some of the biggest questions Miyazaki would ever ask on a simple, intimate scale. In following characters who learn to look at themselves and the world ‘with eyes unclouded,’ Miyazaki himself improved at doing the same. Without the clarity of vision these films afforded him, he may not have had the capacity to create something as complicated and challenging as *Princess Mononoke*, arguably his greatest masterpiece, and the film that, in its exploration of conflict between human societies and the natural world, gives literal and thematic voice most strongly to the ‘seeing with eyes unclouded’ ideal. It is not a film concerned with creativity, and yet it asks many of these same questions as *Kiki’s Delivery Service* and *Whisper of the Heart*, again pondering how people live a fulfilling life in a world so fraught with tension, strife, and repression – ideas that would be again be applied, in new and different contexts, in works like *Spirited Away* and *Howl’s Moving Castle*. Without time spent solidifying the smaller,

more formative ideas in *Kiki* and *Whisper*, these films would not be possible. Creative introspection is one of the keys to Miyazaki's career.

It is not insignificant, in short, that Miyazaki would return to topics of creativity at the same moment he crafted what was consciously his final narrative feature. *The Wind Rises* is the culmination of every idea he ever presented as a filmmaker, and the power, boundaries, and ethereal dimensions of creativity and artistry are front and center for his fond and complex cinematic farewell.

## Endnotes

1. Hayao Miyazaki, “Nostalgia for a Lost World,” in *Starting Point: 1979 - 1996*, trans. Beth Carey and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 18.
2. All dialogue quotes from the film in this chapter are derived from the English-language subtitle track on the 2011 “Studio Ghibli ga ippai (Collection)” Japanese Blu-Ray release, translated by Ian MacDougall.
3. ‘Younger’ being relative – Kondo was 45 at the time of the film’s release, which is not an uncommon age for a Japanese animator to first direct a feature, given the rigors of rising up in an industry where most prominent figures start at the very bottom, with in-between animation. Miyazaki himself had worked for many years before getting a feature film assignment – *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* in 1979, when Miyazaki was 38 – and even more before directing his first fully original work, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, in 1984 at the age of 43.
4. Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation – Films, Themes, Artistry* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 39.
5. One of the most significant positions in Japanese animation below the director, overseeing key animator and the overall visual design of a picture, usually done in groups of three at Studio Ghibli. Supervising Animators are also deeply involved in the pre-production process, creating concept art and, on occasion, contributing to storyboards.
6. Key Animators are senior staff members who animate the key frames of a scene – typically, the first and last frames of an action, with the movement then handed off to the lower-ranking in-between animators.
7. Unlike Miyazaki, who is obsessively involved in all details of the animation process (personally checking and revising tens of thousands of frames per production), Takahata himself does not animate. As a result, there is more room in his films for the voices of senior animators, like Kondo, to shine through. In fact, *Whisper of the Heart* looks so much like *Grave of the Fireflies* and *Only Yesterday* that I suspect Kondo may have been chiefly responsible for their visual style. That Takahata’s *Pom Poko* (1994), made with a different supervising animator and art director, and *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (1999), produced after Kondo’s death, look so different from Takahata’s earlier Ghibli films would lend credence to this theory. And one must wonder if Kondo’s passing in 1998 contributed to Takahata’s long break from directing; he did not helm a film again until 2013’s *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*.

8. I have seen it stated – on online Wikis, fan pages, and within both print and online analyses of *Whisper of the Heart* – that the Olivia Newton-John cover of “Country Roads” used in the film was a huge hit in Japan in the 1970s, which would certainly add another dimension of significance to its use in the film. However, I am unsure where these reports originate from. The only Japanese singles chart that goes back as far as 1973, the year of the song’s release, is the Oricon Singles Chart, but it appears to only report works of Japanese artists (this is unsurprising, as it is the Japanese music industry’s standard chart). More detailed data for both domestic and international singles in Japan does not reach back as far as the 1970s. Tsort.info, the internet’s most comprehensive database for international music charts, explains that while Japan is the world’s second-largest music market, “obtaining reasonable historic chart data is really quite difficult” due to issues of translation and sourcing. Their data only goes back as far as 1988. So while it is certainly possible that Newton-John’s cover was a hit in Japan, I am unable to verify the validity of this claim beyond anecdotal evidence. “The Japan Tokyo Song Chart,” *Tsort.info*, accessed October 11th, 2014, [http://tsort.info/music/chart\\_song\\_jptokyo.htm](http://tsort.info/music/chart_song_jptokyo.htm).

9. R.W. Hepburn, “Wonder,” in *‘Wonder’ and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 140.

10. Thus the appropriateness of the original Japanese title: *Mimi o Sumaseba*, which is commonly translated as “If You Listen Closely.” Where the English title, *Whisper of the Heart*, reflects Shizuku’s internal creative drive (which makes it a fine and fitting alternate title), the Japanese name suggests the connection to one’s setting and the natural world that is equally crucial to the film.

11. When watching the scene unfold alongside others, it has a similar effect. *Whisper of the Heart* was one of the last films I watched with my father before he passed away, and I will never forget us discovering this scene together, both of us utterly enchanted and astonished and inspired by it, rewinding and rewatching it several times before moving on with the film. Cinema rarely had that strong an effect on my dad. Ghibli movies often did – and this moment more than any other.

12. In an amusing Easter egg, there is a little witch figurine – one that looks very much like the logo for Kiki’s eponymous delivery service – hanging from the shelves by Shizuku’s desk, clearly visible when she is writing. It is one of several such references to other Ghibli works in the film, the most prominent being the manufacturer name of the clock Mr. Nishi repairs: *Porco Rosso*.

13. “Introduction,” Naohisa Inoue, 2003, <http://www.iblard.com/english/intro.html>.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid. The prose here is wonky due to the multi-lingual nature of the website (small grammatical corrections have been made). Inoue is of course Japanese, but the site has pages in English, French, and Chinese as well. The page states that explaining Iblard “in English is a bit of a task! So please bear with me.”

16. Hayao Miyazaki, “What is Most Important for Children,” in *Turning Point: 1997 – 2008*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederick L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 167.

17. As described by Roger Ebert: “Ozu uses ‘pillow shots’ like the pillow words in Japanese poetry, separating his scenes with brief, evocative images from everyday life. He likes trains, clouds, smoke, clothes hanging on a line, empty streets, small architectural details, banners blowing in the wind ...”. The films of Miyazaki, Takahata, and Studio Ghibli often seem to owe a certain stylistic debt to Ozu’s calm, measured style, but this moment in *Whisper of the Heart* may be the clearest echo of an Ozu technique in the entire Ghibli canon. Roger Ebert, “Great Movies: Tokyo Story,” *RogerEbert.com*, November 9, 2003, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-tokyo-story-1953>.

18. There is a quote from Miyazaki that has proliferated online in which he explains why he chose to have Seiji propose marriage. “I wanted to make a conclusion, a definite sense of ending. Too many young people now are afraid of commitment, and stay on moratorium forever. I wanted these two to just commit to something, not just ‘well, we’ll see what will happen.’” This quote has been circulating fan sites and online Wikis for years now, popular whenever questions about the ending are raised, and as it does provide an interesting explanation of Miyazaki’s intent, I wanted to research its validity for inclusion in this study. The oldest English-language webpage I am aware of containing the quote is the *Whisper of the Heart* FAQ on the Ghibli Wiki at nausicaa.net (<http://nausicaa.net/miyazaki/mimi/faq.html#proposal>). However, the site offers no attribution of any sort for the quote’s origin. The Wikipedia page for the film also uses this quote, and cites Dani Cavallaro’s *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006). Upon inspecting Cavallaro’s book, however, it happens that she attributes the quote to the Ghibli Wiki FAQ page (and even puts words in Miyazaki’s mouth that the Ghibli Wiki does not attribute to Miyazaki). I then decided to go straight to the sources to see if they could shine a light on this, but it resulted in another dead end. An e-mail into the staff at the Ghibli Wiki has not yet received a reply, and Dani Cavallaro maintains no public contact information, either privately or through her publishers. At this point, I would conclude that the quote is, at a minimum, not trustworthy. There remains a possibility that it is real – it certainly sounds like Miyazaki’s voice – but even if the quote is not entirely fabricated, its English-language

origins go back so many years, and has been circulated without attribution for so long, that I would expect it represents a mangled or incomplete translation of his original comment, if such a thing exists. Until such time as genuine attribution for the quote is uncovered, scholars of *Whisper of the Heart* would do well to avoid relying on it.

19. In many ways, the ending of *Whisper of the Heart* is reminiscent of the final scene of Isao Takahata's *Only Yesterday*, which shares Kondo as a key creative figure and Yoko Honna as a lead voice actress (Honna plays Shizuku in *Whisper*, and the younger version of protagonist Taeko in *Yesterday*). *Only Yesterday* charts the story of a 27-year-old woman's trip to the Japanese countryside, an experience which prompts her to begin recalling formative moments from when she was 10. It is one of Ghibli's greatest and most profound films, a subtle and tremendously insightful story about how social boundaries and conditioning prevent a person from being one's true self as a child, and make it hard to access one's internal compass as an adult. As Taeko spends time in the country among farmers, a place and pastime she truly loves, she continually accesses memories of moments when her personality was repressed or dreams nullified, moments that shaped her into the person who would choose an unfulfilling life in the city rather than searching for a personally meaningful existence. And in the final scene, as Taeko boards the train to leave the countryside, she ultimately chooses to disembark, go back, and stay for good – symbolized by her reunion with the film's lead male character, the farmer Toshio, and the implication of a romance between them. The details are therefore similar to *Whisper of the Heart* – the female protagonist chooses life with the male lead as the culmination of her arc – and yet it works absolutely in *Only Yesterday*, both because Taeko's choice is completely organic to every theme of the story and to her development as an individual, and because Toshio has been developed as a three-dimensional figure, one whom Taeko would believably want to commit herself to as more than a mere symbol of her internal journey. Had *Whisper of the Heart* managed to do the same (though whether this would even be possible with teenage characters is somewhat doubtful), the ending would likely feel much less problematic.

20. Animation, it must be understood, is a wildly demanding process. As Helen McCarthy explains, the animation process is “labor- and energy-intensive as well as time-consuming. Good animation *looks* effortless but the stress on the staff is enormous” (*Hayao Miyazaki*, 37). The common image of the Japanese animator is that of a person slouched over a desk, working tirelessly for hours on end, often smoking while they do so (Miyazaki himself smokes near-constantly while working). As a result of this work environment, health problems are not uncommon for animators. In 1982, Miyazaki gave a lecture telling the story of a dedicated female finish inspector (the person

responsible for making the final checks and corrections on frames before they go out for final processing and coloring) who routinely stayed at the animation studio, sleeping for only a few hours each night, and going home only to do laundry. Miyazaki thought she would surely suffer from overwork, and sure enough, she eventually collapsed and was rushed to the hospital – only to come back to work with haste. She was an exceptionally dedicated worker, but her story is still emblematic of the kind of work ethic put in by the most devoted of animators – a description that would certainly fit Studio Ghibli, Miyazaki (who hand-checks and alters tens of thousands of frames per production), and, indeed, Yoshifumi Kondo. Hayao Miyazaki, “A Woman Finish Inspector,” in *Starting Point: 1979-2008*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 179-88.

21. McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*, 46.

22. “Ghibli Co-Founder Suzuki: Studio Considers Dismantling Production Department,” *Anime News Network*, August 3, 2014, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2014-08-03/ghibli-co-founder-suzuki-studio-considers-dismantling-production-department/.77263>. While recent American reports of Studio Ghibli’s closure are categorically false, producer Toshio Suzuki has confirmed they have no features in development at the moment, and are considering various possible restructuring options at this critical juncture.

23. Hayao Miyazaki, “The Elemental Power of the Forest Also Lives Within the Hearts of Human Beings,” in *Turning Point: 1997 – 2008*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 29.

24. Ibid.



# 風立ちぬ

## Chapter Three: Vapor Trail

### Rectifying the kingdom of cursed dreams in *The Wind Rises*

*So, given the overall condition of our culture, what do I think should be done about this overproduction problem and other issues? Frankly, I find it a true dilemma. Part of me thinks that the best thing would be to simply not make any more shows. I question, for example, whether it's necessary for someone to add a bucket of water to a flood, just because it's particularly good water. However, I can justify doing so by saying that even in the midst of a flood we still need to drink good water once in a while. So, in similar fashion, when a good job comes my way I tend to throw myself into my work, adding to the flood, and thus I always find myself on the horns of a dilemma.*

Hayao Miyazaki, 1985<sup>1</sup>

In more ways than one, the starting point for *The Wind Rises* is a cursed dream.

The film opens on a misty green countryside, a traditional Japanese household situated within its midst. Inside, thirteen-year-old Jiro Horikoshi,<sup>2</sup> the protagonist, sleeps peacefully beneath a mosquito net. In his dream, cleanly transitioned to with a silent, unimposing cut, he climbs onto the roof and approaches a colorful bird-shaped plane; on the horizon, beyond the foggy country field, lies a tall mountain range, its peaks tinted with soft oranges and purples by the teal sky above. Jiro boards the single-seat flier and takes off, just as the sun bursts forth from

the horizon, casting the clouds, mountains, and fields in a brilliant, breathtaking luminescence. As Jiro flies, the sun's light follows him, breaking over the land below in vivid, vibrant greens. It is as if the very act of flying, the object of this boy's dream, illuminates everything, adding color, life, and vitality to all the eye can see. As he flies over the village, people below lean out from windows to look upon him in astonishment. When they wave, Jiro returns the favor, smiling broadly. It is a beautiful dream.

But this vision is tinged with darkness, for as Jiro flies, a mysterious assortment of black, pulsating bombs emerge from the clouds above, all tethered to an enormous metal zeppelin. Jiro pulls on his goggles, a determined look in his eyes – but suddenly, his vision begins to blur, and he rips the goggles off with haste, only to reveal a previously unseen pair of glasses beneath them. In the time he was distracted, the bombs – all ridden by mysterious, gooey black creatures, “hanging from the airship on wires like the sticky strings of *natto* beans”<sup>3</sup> – have come nearer; they make contact with his plane and tear it to pieces. A stunned, bespectacled Jiro enters a gradual free-fall, framed against the same stunningly green fields from before, now streaked with the billowing smoke of a passing train.

When Jiro wakes, his blurry eyesight reminds him of his real-world need for glasses – the detail that will make his dream of flight a permanent impossibility. Whether he wakes or sleeps, it is a cursed dream. Flight is inaccessible to him in reality, and though he can achieve it in a fantasy, actualizing his ambitions to soar among the clouds and witness the remarkable beauty of the world below, the darkness of reality still intrudes. Jiro's dream cannot remain untouched by the anxieties of his poor eyesight, nor, indeed, by the horrors of war. Jiro was born in 1903, placing this scene in 1916, in the middle of the first World War; the bomber he encounters is a fantastical version of Germany's deadly Zeppelin LZ1.<sup>4</sup> His dreamscape may be a kingdom, a

personal vision of awe and empowerment, but it is forever tainted; beauty and darkness exist within it simultaneously. How does one live amidst this dichotomy?

As with *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Whisper of the Heart*, this first scene is the film in microcosm, for *The Wind Rises* is a story about the dualistic nature of the human condition – our capacity for imagination and creation in constant conflict with our violent and destructive tendencies, our will to live juxtaposed against the harsh realities of life. The Paul Valéry quote that precedes the film – *Le vent se lève! ... il faut tenter de vivre! (The wind is rising! We must try to live!)*<sup>5</sup> – and which is repeated by the characters several times throughout is reflective of this duality. It is a two-part philosophy. On one side is the wind, a metaphor for all the various and unpredictable challenges the world has in store for us; on the other is life, which one must strive to live as fully as one can no matter how strong the wind becomes.

If 'seeing with eyes unclouded' is Miyazaki's mission statement, this could well be his career's thesis. From *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* – a story about a community trying to live peacefully on a post-apocalyptic Earth amidst neighboring warring nations – to *My Neighbor Totoro* – where two young girls grapple with grief over their mother's illness and hospitalization through communion with nature – to *Princess Mononoke* – in which a young man afflicted with a terrible curse journeys west and attempts to find a peaceful resolution in the conflict between industrial society and the natural world, and which even took as its tagline the word *Ikiru* ('Live,' conjugated as a command) – and every feature in between, Miyazaki's films each deal in some way with the implications of this philosophy.<sup>6</sup> He is an artist consumed with exploring how human beings try to live when the wind rises highest – and it is no surprise, therefore, that he would confront these ideas most directly for the film he intended to be his final feature,<sup>7</sup> nor that creative reflection would once again rise to the surface. *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Whisper of*

*the Heart* are each about protagonists who learn to face the challenges of the real world through accessing a creative spirit, and actualizing themselves as resilient individuals in the process. *The Wind Rises* takes these ideas several steps further, not only positing creative expression as a viable means of living – something one can turn to and find strength in when a challenge or crisis presents itself – but exploring, through the story of Jiro Horikoshi and the invention of a deadly war machine, what happens when creativity itself falls on the other side of that dichotomy, turning from beautiful dream into nightmarish reality. Where creativity once provided meaningful answers for characters like Kiki and Shizuku, in *The Wind Rises*, it too is dualistic – a cursed dream in and of itself.

Even the film's narrative and thematic sources are a series of dualistic complements.<sup>8</sup> *The Wind Rises* is based primarily on the lives and works of two prominent Japanese artists and intellectuals, each born one year apart:<sup>9</sup> airplane engineer Jiro Horikoshi, designer of the infamous Zero Fighter – Japan's deadliest and most effective weapon in World War II – and writer Tatsuo Hori, whose novella *Kaze Tachinu* (*The Wind Rises*) gives the film its title, among many other things. Miyazaki's film is not, therefore, a straight biographical picture, but a historical drama that uses the details of Horikoshi's life as its narrative spine, and Hori's poetic writing for its style and imagery. The film's protagonist, named and detailed after Horikoshi, is constructed along similar lines; Jiro's professional life as an airplane engineer adheres to Horikoshi's real-world career, while his personal life is inspired by the characters and scenarios of Hori's writing, *Kaze Tachinu* in particular. Like the Paul Valéry quote, which positions the desire to live against the challenges of life, the film is assembled from two source bodies, ideas that may seem to exist in opposition on the surface – a creator of war machines and an author of

quiet, emotional stories – yet which create a more meaningful, all-encompassing philosophy on living when combined.

For a pacifist like Miyazaki, whose films so often focus on the unnecessary horrors of war, (*Nausicaä*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Howl's Moving Castle* in particular), the choice of Horikoshi and the design of the Zero Fighter as subject may seem like a puzzling one. The Mitsubishi A6M Zero was, for a time, the most effective fighter plane in the world, allowing Japan to decimate America's air forces at Pearl Harbor and dominate the pacific theater for another six months after. As aviation expert Martin Caidin explains:

In the Zero the Japanese enjoyed the ideal advantage of both qualitative and quantitative superiority. The Japanese fighter was faster than any opposing plane. It outmaneuvered anything in the air. It outclimbed and could fight at greater heights than any plane in all Asia and the pacific. It had twice the combat range of our standard fighter, the P-40, and it featured the heavy punch of cannon. Zero pilots had cut their combat teeth in China and so enjoyed a great advantage over our own men. Many of the Allied pilots who contested in their own inferior planes the nimble product of Jiro Horikoshi literally flew suicide missions.<sup>10</sup>

Though the Allied forces introduced superior aircraft by the middle of 1942, rendering the Zero increasingly obsolete as the war dragged on (Japan never managed to innovate beyond the Zero design, and quickly lost their military edge as a result), the fighter's significance was vast. Without it, Japan could never have commenced hostilities in the pacific; one wonders how the nation's wartime history might have changed, for better or for worse, if Horikoshi had never designed something so deadly and empowering.

Yet as Miyazaki argues in *The Wind Rises*, the Zero represents more than just war-making to Japanese history – it was also a major creative accomplishment, and Horikoshi was, in turn, a significant 20<sup>th</sup> century artist. At the time of the Zero's invention, Japan – which had started the process of industrialization during the 1880s, much later than many other nations – was known to the world as an industrial copycat, catching up to foreign technology by studying

it closely and, in many cases, duplicating it outright.<sup>11</sup> While this is not uncommon for any country during its “industrial gestation period,” and Japan had already begun developing “original ideas and products,”<sup>12</sup> a distrustful attitude persisted from the West, as Miyazaki dramatizes in the sequence where Jiro and his colleague Honjo visit Germany to examine a bomber, and are treated with scorn and suspicion by the German military. The very act of turning to another nation for help in their aircraft design makes Jiro uncomfortable, and combined with the nods towards Japan’s poor economic conditions in the pre-war period – “Why is Japan so poor?” Jiro laments to Honjo after offering food to two displaced orphans<sup>13</sup> – there is an undercurrent of national shame to the story, and to Jiro’s attitude in particular. Unable to feed its own people or design its own war machines, Japan has a deficit of pride in the period the film depicts, and the new way of thinking Jiro develops after the visit to Germany – considering ways Japan’s existing resources can be used to design a great fighter plane, rather than merely endeavoring to replicate the power of other nations – seems like a reaction to this lack of original achievement.

It is this crucial shift in perspective that gives birth to the Zero, and it has its roots entirely in creativity. In one of the film’s clearest illustrations of this, Jiro leads an evening design session late in the film, explaining his vision for the plane to other employees in terms of forward-thinking originality, compensating for Japan’s underpowered engines and lack of resources with ingenuity of design. With all participants excited and joyful, visualizing the aircraft Jiro describes right alongside him, it is a communal moment of creative expression, not a mandated attempt to match a set of specifications or duplicate the power of another nation’s design. “This is delightful,” says the Mitsubishi section chief, Hattori, looking in on the meeting. “Lucid and logical.” The moment feels exhilarating because it is something Japan’s industrial

sector has not necessarily had before – a creative passion driving true innovation. This is why the Zero Fighter matters as more than just a symbol of war. In this plane, Horikoshi invented something truly original, a unique achievement of Japanese origin that put the country on equal or greater military footing with the rest of the world, without turning to anyone or anything outside its own borders. It was a triumph of creative and artistic thinking, and it makes perfect sense that a filmmaker like Miyazaki, so interested in the processes of imagination and creative awakening, would be fascinated by this moment in history.

This is especially evident when one considers that the inherent contradictions of the Zero Fighter – an awe-inspiring creative accomplishment that led to mass amounts of death and destruction, an invention that gave Japan pride but also, in facilitating military aggressions, invited the nation's wartime doom – are directly in line with the dualistic themes of Miyazaki's works, a prime representation of how something can be simultaneously beautiful and devastating. Jiro's journey in the film starts with a cursed dream, and in the Zero Fighter, ends with a literal manifestation of this idea. His creative impulse is, as we shall see, wondrous and exciting, the force that gives his life direction and meaning, and which enables him to 'live' when the historical and personal tragedies that color the film arise; yet his creativity is also and inevitably tragic. That Miyazaki would choose to characterize creativity in such darkly dynamic fashion, in his final feature no less, reveals just how personal a project *The Wind Rises* truly is, for these are anxieties Miyazaki has harbored about his own artistry over the course of his entire film career.

From the earliest days of his work in theatrical animation on to the present, in countless interviews, lectures, and essays, Miyazaki has expressed a profound discomfort with the Japanese animation industry, and of the role he inhabits within it.<sup>14</sup> While he sincerely believes

that animation has a unique artistic power – it is, in his words, “the best method of expressing what is inside people’s hearts”<sup>15</sup> – and that good films can help people discover “something positive that they didn’t know they had in themselves,”<sup>16</sup> he is also filled with self-doubt over issues of overproduction, commercialization, and exploitation. “Perhaps one of the biggest problems in our culture today is that we are inundated with images,” he explained in 1985.<sup>17</sup> Where films were once something special, an experience one had to go out of one’s way to access, the modern culture of mass media has, to Miyazaki’s mind, reduced the positive power and impact of all kinds of imagery, for both creator and consumer alike. In 1988, Miyazaki explained:

I simply can't discuss the business we are in without a bit of bitterness. Compared to some of the works from the 1950s that I will always hold as a gold standard, the animation that we are making in the 1980s resembles the food served on jumbo jet airliners. Mass production has changed everything. The emotions and thoughts that should be so moving have given way to showiness, nervousness, and titillation. And work that should be done lovingly by hand has been whittled away at within organized production systems that focus on straight work for hire. I frankly despise the truncated word “anime” because to me it only symbolizes the current desolation of our industry.<sup>18</sup>

Miyazaki and his colleagues at Studio Ghibli have actively strived to be better than the industry at large, working from a set of foundational principles – “to create animation that had some meaning and was worth making”<sup>19</sup> through a rigorous work ethic, high artistic standards, good conditions for staff members, and absolutely no sequels – that are key to the world-renowned, benchmark quality of the studio’s work. When Miyazaki feels these standards slipping, or that the studio has become lethargic, he works hard to improve things, as expressed in a 1991 interview where he claims the studio has a responsibility to reinvest their financial success in their workers, and further nurture an environment in which animators will feel compelled to do good work.<sup>20</sup> Yet despite his best efforts to rise above the problems of the animation industry, Miyazaki can never wholly escape the ethically troubling issues of



commercialization or overproduction. “It is like pouring clear water drop by drop into the muddy flood waters,” he said in 1982, several years before the founding of Studio Ghibli.<sup>21</sup> In 1988, he elaborated:

I still think that encountering wonderful animation as a child is not a bad thing. Yet I’m also acutely aware that this profession is actually a business, targeting children’s purchasing power. No matter how much we pride ourselves in being conscientious, we produce visual works that stimulate children’s visual and auditory senses, and whatever experiences we provide them are in a sense stealing time from them that otherwise might be spent in a world where they go out and make their own discoveries or have their own personal experiences. In the society in which we live today, the sheer volume of material being produced can potentially distort everything.<sup>22</sup>

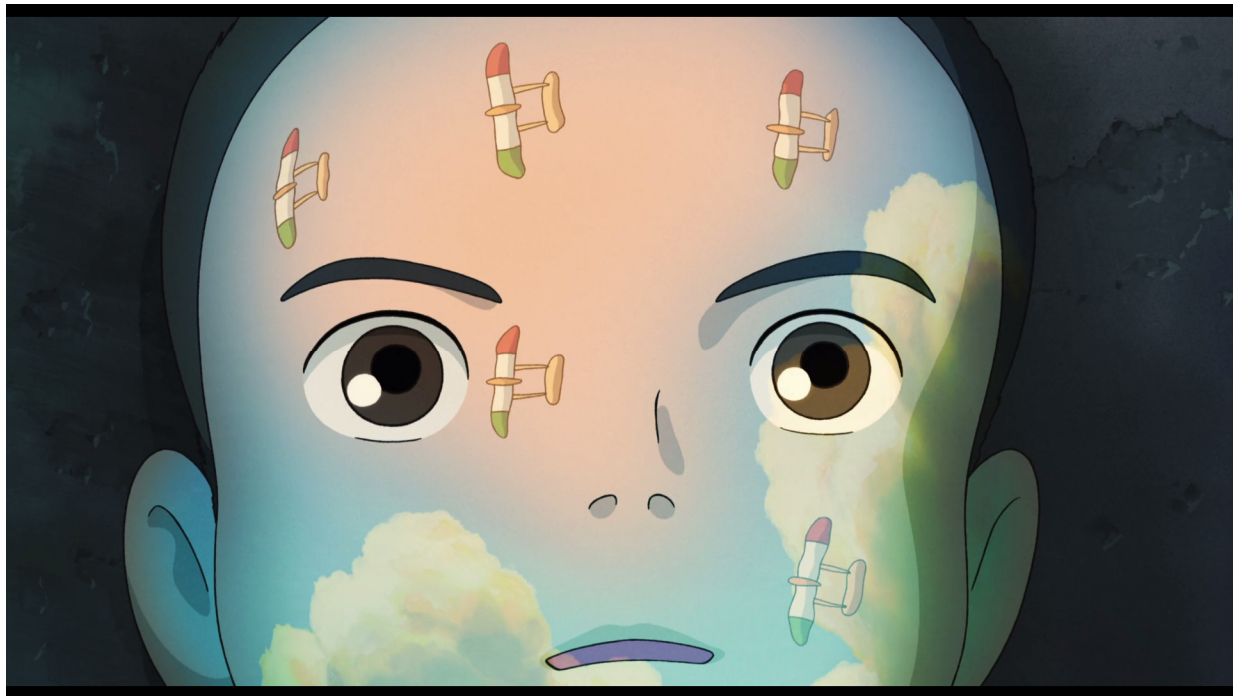
It is no surprise, therefore, that Miyazaki would identify with Jiro Horikoshi, a man who had a historically remarkable creative passion and ingenuity, yet worked in a system – airplane engineering – in which his creations, once released upon the world, would inevitably play into a destructive atmosphere at odds with his own creative impulses. Like Miyazaki, Horikoshi – who was internally opposed to Japan’s wartime actions<sup>23</sup> – expressed horror and frustration over what his creation became. In *Eagles of Mitsubishi*, Horikoshi describes the difficulty he encountered trying to write words of condolence for the Kamikaze Special Attack Forces near the end of the war; the pilots who sacrificed themselves flew Zeros, and Kamikaze was the final fate for most of the fighters that had survived combat, leaving all Zeros destroyed at the end of the war. “It was impossible for me to praise the special attackers without qualifications,” wrote Horikoshi. “Why did Japan plunge into a war she could not expect to win? Why were the Zeros used in such a way?”<sup>24</sup> In 2011, around the time active production began on *The Wind Rises*, Miyazaki explained how he came to feel connected with the material. “My wife and my staff would ask me, ‘Why make a story about a man who made weapons of war?’ ... And I thought they were right. But one day, I heard that Horikoshi had once murmured, ‘All I wanted to do was to make something beautiful.’ And then I knew I’d found my subject.”<sup>25</sup>

The question of creativity's value in ethically problematic environments – how one approaches the artistic impulse to 'make something beautiful' in a world prone to contort and disfigure splendor into something dark and harmful – is thus central to how Miyazaki represents creativity in *The Wind Rises*. While this difficult issue forms the core of Miyazaki's personal identification with Horikoshi, it is far from the only point of connection, and in illustrating the life of a fellow artist, Miyazaki paints the most detailed and passionate picture of creative thinking in all his films.

Jiro's journey of creative awakening begins, as it must, with fantasy. As seen in *Whisper of the Heart*, the ability to actively engage with one's imagination – to explore one's passions and inspirations within a personal dominion free from the constraints of reality – is one of the greatest skills an artist can have. Jiro is introduced to us within a dream, his capacity to actualize his nascent passion for flight within his own mind – along with subsequent childhood scenes depicting his enthusiasm for extracurricular studies and assertive pacifist personality<sup>26</sup> – immediately establishing him as a peer to Kiki or Shizuku, a strong individual with a budding creative spirit. In his first fantasy, though, creativity has yet to become a conscious process; it is in the second such sequence that this journey becomes part of his waking mind.

As Jiro and his little sister, Kayo,<sup>27</sup> lay on the roof together, Jiro squinting at the stars trying to improve his eyesight, Kayo points to the heavens, enraptured by the multitude of dots in the sky. The camera follows the direction of her gesture, panning up through the night air and, almost magically, up into daylight, to a group of Italian fighter planes soaring against a backdrop of earthy yellow clouds with deep purple underbellies, illustrated with evocative, painterly brushstrokes. A cut back to Jiro, looking up into the air with his eyes open wide in rapt

astonishment, projects this wondrous skyscape translucently over his face; he looks as though he is in the midst of a profound internal awakening.



Now Jiro is in a windy green field, the Italian planes flying low; he can see the pilots up close, and starts running alongside them. A man dressed in a sharp blue suit, not a pilot's uniform, calls to him in Italian. "I'm a Japanese boy," Jiro responds. "I think this is my dream." The man hops out of the plane, and stops before Jiro with unrealistic grace; behind him is the most spectacular assortment of clouds, tinted with dark, rich greens, yellows, oranges, and teals by the mixture of ground and sky. The man is Count Giovanni Battista Caproni, the infamous Italian airplane engineer, whom Jiro recognizes from an English aviation magazine he was given at school. This man fulfilled a similar role in Italy as Jiro would go on to do in Japan; he produced the nation's "first practical aircraft in 1911," and "supplied many bombers and transport planes to the Allied nations during World War I."<sup>28</sup>

"This world is a dream," explains the Count. "Welcome to my Kingdom." Caproni, having taken an immediate liking to this boy so passionate about aviation, then introduces Jiro to

his planes, giving a military salute the pilots return as they fly along, fully armed and at combat stations. “They will bomb the enemy city,” says Caproni. “Most of them won’t return.” The film cuts silently to an image of the planes flying above a city engulfed in flames, dark smoke clouds billowing up into an inky blue sky; one plane has been hit, and falls into the fire. In the following cut, this blood-orange portrait of destruction is reflected in the lenses of Jiro’s glasses. It is quite literally an eye-opening sight. Where Jiro previously dreamed unwillingly of war’s horrors tainting the beauty of flight, he has now been forcefully introduced to the potential terrors of aviation.

“But the war will soon be over,” says Caproni, moving on. The sky behind him is fading into dusk, the blues of the clouds darkening as the orange of sunset emerges from the bottom of the frame. Caproni gestures for a much bigger transport plane to come pick them up, a huge, multi-storied green creation with vast wingspans meant to carry passengers, not weapons. It is an awe-inspiring invention. “This is my dream,” Caproni explains. “When the war is over, I will build this.” By turning from the decimation of this dream to the wondrous possibilities also encompassed within it, he is instructing Jiro about the compromises of artistry. War colors everything, yet when the time comes, look what can be made! Caproni and Jiro climb a ladder up to the very top of the aircraft, walking across the wings to overlook the ground and water below, a landscape of trees and greenery flecked with small houses, the sea spotted with sailboats. “Of course we can’t climb up here, but dreams are convenient. One can go anywhere,” Caproni lectures. Across from them in the sky is another of Caproni’s creations, an even bigger, even more impossibly ambitious passenger plane, filled with happy, smiling people – an aircraft that makes the dream of flight a rousing reality for many. By taking Jiro up here and showing him these sights, Caproni is illustrating for Jiro the importance of accessing fantasies; for without

dreaming of seeing the world this way, how could the inspiration to create this invention ever come about?

“Mr. Caproni, I have a question,” asks Jiro. “Do you think I could design airplanes? I’ll never be a pilot. I’m too nearsighted.” “Listen, Japanese boy,” replies Caproni. “I’m not a pilot. I don’t even know how to fly!” As he says this, the landscape begins to spin around them wildly. A whole new world of possibilities has opened up – to access the splendor of the sky from the creativity of one’s mind, rather than physically going there with one’s body, is a possibility Jiro had not even considered. “To fly airplanes is simple,” Caproni continues. “But I am a creator of airplanes. An aeronautical engineer!” Asleep in his bed, Jiro shouts “Yes!” Back in the dream, now transitioned to a starry night sky with a bright green moon shining above, Caproni gives one last piece of advice. “Listen to me, Japanese boy. Airplanes are not tools for war. They are not for making money. Airplanes are beautiful dreams. Engineers turn dreams into reality.” And with that, Jiro has found his path forward; shortly thereafter, the film transitions to depicting his adult life.



In this, one of only several crucial and elaborate fantasy sequences, Jiro has been awakened to the power – both uplifting and destructive – of his artistic ambition, and attained the internal tools necessary to lead a life of creation. Caproni, a sort of spiritual guide, is one of them, a mental image of a great aeronautical forbearer Jiro turns to for advice and inspiration. In this way, Caproni fulfills the same role for Jiro in *The Wind Rises* as Osono did for Kiki in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, or Mr. Nishi did for Shizuku in *Whisper of the Heart*. He is the adult figure who helps the protagonist navigate and understand the challenges of independence and creativity, serving the same narrative and thematic function as the earlier characters while taking on a very different form. The move from a literal, living mentor to Caproni, a fantasy guide, is reflective of both Jiro's adulthood – while we see him as a child early on, Jiro is largely depicted as a grown man, unlike the adolescent portraits of Kiki and Shizuku, and this necessitates a different kind of counselor<sup>29</sup> – and of the artistic fraternity the two figures share as engineers. Even as a fantasy – or, perhaps, because he is a fantasy, and therefore an internal projection – Caproni can understand Jiro in ways more direct than Osono and Nishi, wonderful and supportive as they are, can with Kiki and Shizuku. For instance, in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake sequence, as Jiro and Honjo are sitting near a large pile of books rescued from a damaged building, the wind shifts, starting another fire. As Jiro and Honjo hurry to put it out, Jiro has a vision of Caproni, who, in this fantasy, just suffered a major personal setback of his own with the unsuccessful test flight of one of his enormous, dream passenger planes. “Is the wind still rising, Japanese boy?” Caproni asks. “Yes, it's a gale,” Jiro responds, trying to stifle the flames with a shirt. “Then you must live,” Caproni reassures him, tossing the film from his embarrassing, failed test into the water. “*Le vent se lève. Il faut tenter de vivre.*”

Fantasy itself, however, is the most important tool Jiro has to turn to in his creative endeavors. In his first engineering assignment at Mitsubishi, for instance, Jiro visualizes his way through the tough problem he has been set, seeing in his mind's eye a stark white plane soaring through the sky. Miyazaki illustrates this with total conviction, of course, breathing life into this fantasy image we know to be a product of Jiro's mind with the same dedication spent evoking any sight in the film. Jiro imagines how the wind exerts force on the wings, even seeing underneath the exterior shell to consider how the plane's metal frame might hold up through the rigor of flight. One part breaks, and the plane crumbles to pieces as it hurtles towards earth; Jiro, back at his desk, looks astonished as he thinks of this. He must reconsider the design, and now inserts himself into the fantasy directly, he and his desk careening downwards through the sky just like the plane. As he scribbles notes furiously, papers fly away from his desk in droves. Jiro, working determinedly, seemingly takes no notice. Before he knows it, lunchtime has arrived.

Miyazaki engages in a similar process as he works. In the documentary *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness* (2013; Dir. Mami Sunada), Miyazaki is shown working on the storyboards for the last scene of *The Wind Rises*. Still at the visualization stage, he works with a stopwatch in hand. Over and over again, he repeats a cycle of starting the timer, closing his eyes, and concentrating for a moment, before stopping the timer with precise intensity. He looks at the time. It isn't right. He starts again, now focusing even harder, raising his hand parallel to his eyes as though evening out his internal vision. In his mind, Miyazaki is imagining the shot he will soon plan on paper, visualizing it down to the most precise second in order that its content and timing be perfect; the film must come into being in his mind before it can ever be made tangible. While the documentary can only show us Miyazaki's exterior being, it is clear that, in his mind, the director is engaging in a fantasy space no less real or palpable as the one Jiro summons while

working. For both artist and subject, this process of interior fantasy is everything, allowing them to engage with the world and their ideas unbound from physical constraints, each able to make impossible dreams palpable through a visit to their respective imaginations.<sup>30</sup>

Within this creative journey, the impossible, cursed dreams that are planes are given center stage on multiple occasions. In fact, the amount of time Miyazaki devotes to depicting various historical aircraft, or immersing us in the technical minutiae of aeronautical design, borders on obsessive. It is nevertheless an obsession that serves several key functions. Sequences filled with engineering jargon are not merely fetishistic, but serve to illustrate how Jiro's greatest ideas and conceptual leaps come from his personality and experiences. Like Shizuku, he incorporates observations from daily life – like mackerel bones, which prompt the idea of an innovative wing design – into his work, so much so that when Honjo sees the Zero prototype for the first time, he declares “This design is you.” And just as Miyazaki manifested creativity through many different forms of artistry in *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Whisper of the Heart*, *The Wind Rises* makes an argument, voiced both by the characters and the film's aesthetics, for the artistic worth of airplanes. Intricately detailed and stunningly animated, the multitude of aircraft contained in the film are lovely works of art in and of themselves; though mostly based on historical designs, Miyazaki brings out a latent beauty to these industrial creations we might never notice in live action.

Yet most of the aircraft we see are or will be tools for war. That Miyazaki cannot help but be consumed with fascination by them is another fundamental contradiction of the film's story, one of several major dichotomies that combine to form the film's overall duality. It is also, of course, another clearly evident trace of the director's personality, this pacifist's fixation on war



planes fundamental to another anxiety Miyazaki has harbored throughout his career. As producer Toshio Suzuki explains:

Miyazaki was born in 1941, so he lived through the war. But just like this character, he finds himself fascinated by military aircrafts. He's a man who's lived with this contradiction. He's torn by what he loves. He's drawn to war planes, yet he's anti-war. How is someone like him even possible? That's what he's trying to answer with this film.<sup>31</sup>

Any fan of Miyazaki, even a casual one, could talk at length about the director's love of aerial technology. Flight is a major component – visually, narratively, or both – of nearly all his films, a passion so readily apparent in his work that it is often the first topic of conversation whenever the director's name is invoked. And like his anxiety over the cultural effects of animation, it is a subject Miyazaki himself is prone to discuss outside his work. In 1980, Miyazaki explained this lifelong preoccupation with warplanes and military technology as stemming from a childhood desire for power. “I was an overly self-conscious boy and I had a hard time holding my own in fights with others, but my classmates eventually accepted me because I was good at drawing. I expressed my own desire for power by drawing airplanes with sleek pointed noses and battleships with huge guns.”<sup>32</sup>

This is not the only relevant explanation, though, especially where *The Wind Rises* is concerned. For not only did Miyazaki grow up during the war, but his father, Katsuji Miyazaki, was a director of the family company, Miyazaki Airplane, which created parts for fighter planes, including the Zero.<sup>33</sup> In 1995, Miyazaki reflected on his father's actions and the impact they had on him, saying:

During the Pacific War, he headed the Miyazaki Airplane factory, making parts for military planes. He had unskilled workers mass-produce parts, many of which were defective. But he told us that if he bribed the people in charge, the parts were usually accepted. And after the war, he had no sense of guilt about having been involved in the military arms industry or having produced defective parts. In effect, for him war was something that only idiots engaged in. If we were going to war anyway, he was going to

make money off of it. He had absolutely no interest in just cause or the fate of the state. For him the only concern was how his family would survive.<sup>34</sup>

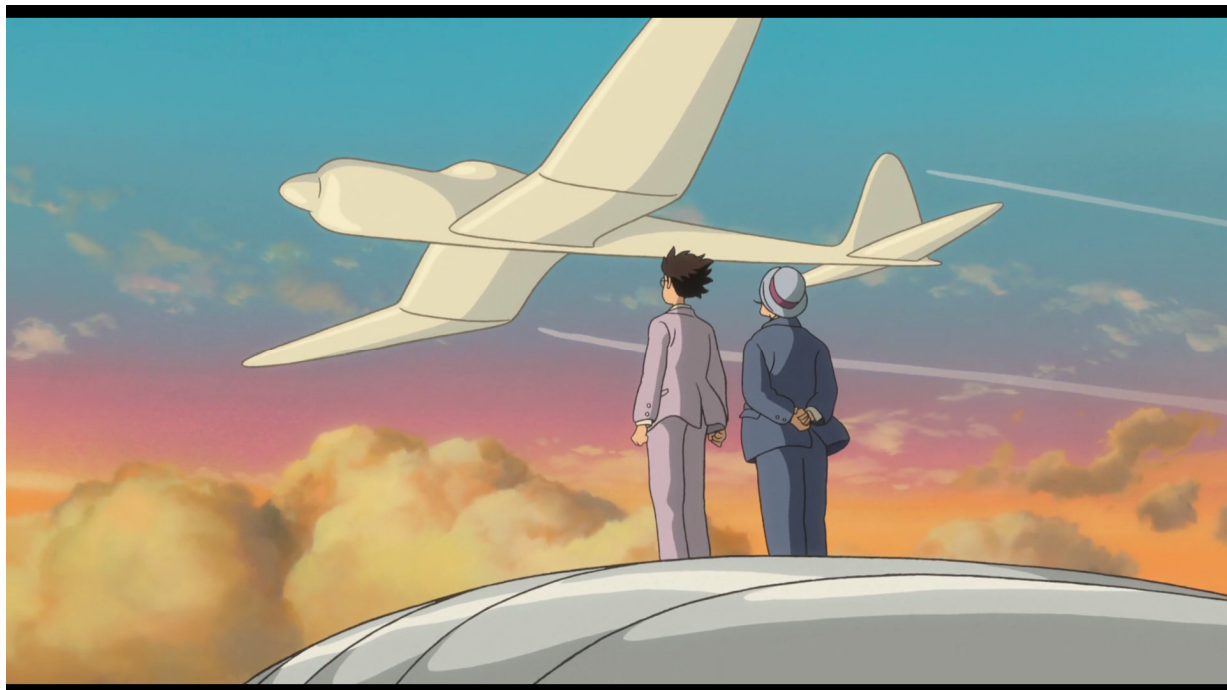
Thoughts of his father bubbled back to the surface during the production of *The Wind Rises*, as depicted in a scene from *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness* when Miyazaki receives a letter from a stranger his father gave shelter to during the war, thus further complicating Miyazaki's conflicted views towards the man.<sup>35</sup> It is clear that the contradictions of aircrafts – the things they drive people to do, and the inspiration they instill in people's hearts – are fundamental to *The Wind Rises*, not only as physical constructions of war, but also as ideas, as an extension of human psychology. "I wonder which is greater," wrote Miyazaki in 1998. "What we gained by making airplanes or what we lost due to them? Is our mercilessness an attribute of ours that we cannot control?"<sup>36</sup>

This question, along with the broader issue of creativity's ethical boundaries, comes to a head in the film's penultimate fantasy sequence, situated only about halfway through the film, at a crucial turning point where Jiro has been sent to see the world and learn from it; Mitsubishi has just lost a military design contract due to a failed prototype, and they know Jiro is a promising talent for future work.<sup>37</sup> Jiro rides a train through a cold winter night beneath a blood orange sky, sitting alone in his compartment and gazing out upon the sunset when Caproni emerges from nowhere and takes a seat next to him (as always in the film, the fantasy intrudes without warning or fanfare). "Is the wind still rising?" the Count asks Jiro. "Yes, it is," Jiro replies. "Then I invite you to join me on my final flight. Come." Caproni leads Jiro out of the compartment, and they leap from the speeding train into the wintry air. Jiro tumbles down a snowy hill, which suddenly transforms into the grassy field from their first meeting. Caproni is in one of his enormous planes – this one a bomber – with dozens of happy, joyous people along for the ride, a celebratory atmosphere in the air. "My workmen's families and relatives," Caproni explains as he leads Jiro

through the crowded plane. “Practically the whole village. We’re taking a private jaunt before we deliver this bomber to the Air Force.” Caproni is again teaching Jiro lessons, this one especially crucial given Jiro’s future; the notion of taking ownership of one’s invention, making sure one has had time to make a personal connection with the majesty of what one has created before it is released into the world, is one of the only ways to stay sane when what one creates has a potential for devastation. This moment is about balancing the impulses of one’s spirit with the harsh realities of life, as many moments in *The Wind Rises* are.

Caproni and Jiro climb to the top of the plane, as they did before, the aircraft soaring through a gorgeous and fertile country landscape. Jiro, still feeling insecure and doubtful about Japan’s industrial capabilities after his visit to Germany, bemoans that “Japan is poor and backward. We could never build something like this.” Caproni reassures him: “The important thing for an engineer is inspiration. Inspiration unlocks the future. Technology will catch up.” This is another piece of advice Jiro will need, the one that proves key to the Zero’s creation – innovative, creative thinking overcoming the boundaries of reality. In the midst of this discussion, Caproni notices his wife and family flying in a smaller plane alongside them, and waves. It is a subtle allusion to the significance of family and friends in a creative person’s life, a theme previously seen in *Kiki’s Delivery Service* – where Kiki needs to start trusting and accepting other people before she can access a creative spirit – and in *Whisper of the Heart*, where it is Shizuku’s competition and friendship with Seiji that inspires her writing. For Caproni, it is clear that his family allows him to have happiness and hope even in the midst of a melancholy situation. Jiro will need to find this balance as well; it is no coincidence that Nahoko, his future wife, will soon re-enter the picture.

Jiro and Caproni travel even further up the bomber, onto the uppermost wing; as they walk towards the edge, a horizon of golden clouds laid out before them, Caproni ponders: “Which would you choose, a world with pyramids or one without them?” Jiro is confused. “Humanity dreams of flight, but the dream is cursed,” Caproni continues. “Aircraft are destined to become tools for slaughter and destruction ... But still, I chose a world with pyramids in it. Which world will you choose?” “I want to create beautiful airplanes,” Jiro concludes; out from the purple-tinged horizon flies a stark, simple aircraft, like a big paper airplane, yet with a strikingly unique aerodynamic design. It is the early, imaginary form of what will become the Zero. As it does a barrel roll over a sky illuminated pink and gold by the setting sun, Caproni praises Jiro’s “beautiful dream,” and tells Jiro that he is retiring. “This is my last design,” Caproni explains, referring to his bomber. “Artists are only creative for ten years. We engineers are no different. Live your ten years to the full.” As he speaks, the camera pans down, through the stunning dusk sky, and further still until it reaches a non-fantasy Tokyo, where Jiro is back at his desk at Mitsubishi, setting to work on the design he just imagined.



This is a fascinating, vital, and at times befuddling sequence, one that operates on several layers of reflexivity. It is created by one artist, Hayao Miyazaki, who is making his final feature film, his own ultimate creation; but he is depicting, at this point, a still-young Jiro Horikoshi, about to embark on the creative journey that will result in his own great, legendary creation; and Horikoshi, in turn, is being mentored by a fantasy of another historical artist, Count Caproni, who has chosen to retire and has had time, over the course of his life, to come to conclusions on all these central ethical and personal dilemmas he discusses with Jiro.

What, then, is the meaning of a statement as broad and challenging as “Artists are only creative for ten years?” Is this a personal belief of Miyazaki’s he channels through Caproni, or something meant to apply specifically to a figure like Horikoshi, known for one great invention he crafted within a decade? The former would certainly be strange, considering that Miyazaki has worked in animation since 1963 and been prominent in the industry for the majority of those five decades; the latter seems less broadly applicable than many of the lessons Miyazaki shares in his reflexive creative narratives. Perhaps we should not poke at it too intently, and instead let the mystery stand on its own terms.<sup>38</sup>

Caproni’s pyramid analogy is much more concrete. The pyramids, like airplanes, are wondrous creations that nevertheless arise from ethically problematic conditions, the allusion likely being the mass amounts of slave labor used to build them (forced labor was also, not coincidentally, used in the construction of the Zero fighters in Japan). At a certain point, one could probably connect any great human endeavor or work of art to something we would find morally repugnant or dispiriting – Miyazaki would undoubtedly throw animation and media onto the list – and yet, it is human nature to always choose the path of art. No sane person would say slavery is good or necessary, but when asked whether one would prefer to live in a world with or

without pyramids, most people would choose the pyramids – and, in turn, the path in which slavery was a systematized human reality.<sup>39</sup> This is the challenge of creativity, the nature of living in a world of cursed dreams, and it is the dilemma which *The Wind Rises* seeks to rectify. In this sequence, through Caproni's logic, we are given the conclusion that while one cannot control the negative exterior forces of the world or of humanity, one can perhaps contribute something positive through one's artistry. There will be war and war machines with or without the individual engineer, just as there will be crass, commercialized, exploitative animation with or without the individual animator; but as Miyazaki says in his flood analogy, and as Caproni's attitude alludes to here, perhaps the individual can still contribute something meaningful to the flood of the world.

But of course, the answers are not as easy as all that. If they were, this sequence would not come only halfway through the picture, with so much of Jiro's career left to unfold, and so many issues of personal trauma left to explore. Jiro's ideas will advance and develop beyond this, and the creation he must learn to live with is perhaps more deadly and destructive than anything Caproni – or, indeed, Hayao Miyazaki – had ever envisioned. The actual answers to these questions are neither easy nor definable. The path from here grows increasingly ethereal and challenging.

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Tatsuo Hori's novella *Kaze Tachinu*, written between 1936 and 1938, traces the arc of a romance between an unnamed writer – the narrator – and Setsuko, a young woman beset with tuberculosis. In a gentle, poetic style that is nevertheless intensely emotional and sensory, Hori – who suffered from a chronic lung ailment himself, and died at 48 – tells the story of their brief marriage, lived mostly in the mountain sanitarium where Setsuko goes to get better, and the

narrator follows to be by her side. During their time there, the narrator is inspired to write a novel about their life together, even as Setsuko's condition worsens. She eventually dies, leaving the narrator alone in a liminal space, grieving and wandering.

If history and Miyazaki's own thoughts on creativity give shape to one half of *The Wind Rises* – the one dealing with Jiro's professional life – then Hori's story and, just as importantly, style form the other, filling in the details of Jiro's personal life.<sup>40</sup> Jiro, in personality and disposition, is characterized akin to Hori's narrator; he is a creative type, who enjoys long strolls outdoors, and is inspired by the woman he loves so desperately. Nahoko, his love interest and, later, wife, is modeled after Setsuko (though named after the title character of Hori's 1941 novel *Nahoko*); a painter, stricken with tuberculosis, costumed in “a hat with a narrow ribbon on it,”<sup>41</sup> who desires to make the most of her limited time with her husband. The circumstances of their meetings are similar in story and film – while Jiro first encounters Nahoko during the Great Kanto Earthquake, their reunion and courtship takes place in the summer, by chance, as in the novella – and while certain details of their time together differ – Nahoko comes to be with Jiro in Tokyo, rather than he going to live with her in the sanitarium – the arc is the same, with the two embracing what little time they have together before Nahoko passes, leaving Jiro, like the narrator, in a conflicted, liminal space.

What the story bequeaths to Miyazaki's work is much more important than mere narrative details, though. Thematically and stylistically, *The Wind Rises* is profoundly informed by Tatsuo Hori, its ideas sharing a common philosophical foundation, its pace and visual presence inspired by his prose. Hori explores the very same questions Miyazaki is interested in, about living amidst tragedy or challenge, and trying to discover what life means when so much of it is difficult. Appropriating the smaller, more intimate scale Hori operates on helps to balance

and enrich Miyazaki's storytelling, broadening the emotional scope of the film to encompass both professional and personal challenges, and connecting Miyazaki's ideas about the dualistic nature of creativity to the paradoxes of romance and daily life. There is a poignant dichotomy at the center of Hori's story – a romance that is perfect and beautiful in every way, except in its transience, the specter of death necessitating that every moment of uplift and pleasure be tinged with doubt and grief – that serves as a powerful counterpoint to the tale Miyazaki tells about Horikoshi and the Zero fighter. It is this fusion of history, personal reflexivity, and Hori's writing that allows Miyazaki to craft a film of such dynamism, where all things are simultaneously wondrous and cursed – a film that embodies the spirit of the Paul Valéry quote both Hori and Miyazaki take as their starting point.

Visually, it is quite possible that *The Wind Rises* is Miyazaki's most rapturous and breathtaking creation. With its gorgeous depictions of natural settings, richly detailed recreation of pre-war Japan, and most strikingly, its evocative, genuinely awe-inspiring sky vistas – painterly horizon lines crafted with complex and majestic combinations of color and light, images that seem to encompass the emotional tenor of a sunny day, a twilit town, or a beautiful country sunset as powerfully as any real-world vision – the film is easily one of the greatest aesthetic accomplishments animated cinema has ever seen. Yet the splendor of the imagery is never obtrusive or overtly attention-grabbing; as in Hori's prose, Miyazaki tells his story at a gentle, gradual pace, allowing the beauty of the film's setting to simply exist, softly and naturally. Like Hori's writing, there is a very poetic quality to it. Take, for example, this descriptive excerpt from *Kaze Tachinu*:

Some ten minutes later my feet carried me into a lush grassy meadow that opened out suddenly where the woods ended, offering a broad view to the distant horizon. I lay down in the shade of a white birch, its leaves already yellow. Here was the very place I lay on those summer days while I watched you paint. On those days the horizon was almost



always blocked by towering clouds; it appeared now over a series of contours set on top of the white tips of the grasses waving in the wind and reaching to distant mountains, unknown to me.<sup>42</sup>

This passage could serve as an exacting textual description of certain moments in *The Wind Rises* – the country location where Nahoko paints is laid out almost exactly as Hori describes it, an amazing visual approximation of his prose – and the style in which Hori textually illustrates natural spaces, both here and throughout his story, serves as a general blueprint for the attention Miyazaki pays to horizons, clouds, the contours of land, and the arrangement of cities. For both Hori and Miyazaki, the sensory context is fundamental to the storytelling. While some spaces are melancholy in and of themselves – like the mountainside sanitarium Setsuko is sent to, a hauntingly beautiful autumnal landscape which Miyazaki recreates for Nahoko in the film – the majority of spaces, whether natural or urban, are strikingly lovely, the mere reality of their aesthetically overwhelming existence filling us with the sort of total wonder R.W. Hepburn would describe as “a sense of absolute contingency”<sup>43</sup> – an ecstatic sensation in which we feel that if this impossibly tranquil field or expansive horizon of exploding colors can exist, then there is something inherently wondrous to the world itself. The melancholy of these spaces comes from what happens within them – war, illness, and all the other things that remind the characters and the audience that this wonder is transient. Powerful and fleeting, beautiful and vulnerable, this world and all that happens in it is itself a dualistic contradiction, something Hori and Miyazaki both perpetually remind us of in their juxtaposition of wondrous style and emotionally challenging content.



*Karuizawa – where Jiro and Nahoko reunite,  
and the mountainside sanitarium where Nahoko stays – both inspired by Tatsuo Hori*

This implicit conflict, between the wonder of existence and the pain caused within it, is reminiscent of an essay by Sigmund Freud, titled “On Transience,” in which he too ponders whether or not the impermanence of life is a damning or uplifting part of the human condition. In the essay, Freud describes taking a summer walk with a young poet friend, who found he could not enjoy the serenity of the countryside due to the knowledge that it was fleeting. “All that he would otherwise have loved and admired seemed to him to be shorn of its worth by the transience which was its doom.”<sup>44</sup> Freud considers how his friend’s pessimistic attitude is one of two common reactions to transience, the other being a rebellious insistence on believing all things must have an everlasting quality, despite all evidence to the contrary. Freud posits that neither impulse is the most healthy or accurate, and declares that, to him, transience actually increases his appreciation for the world and all it contains. “Transience value is scarcity value in time,” he explains. “Limitation in the possibility of an enjoyment raises the value of the enjoyment.”<sup>45</sup> And since we find awe and inspiration in things like nature, the human form, and art based on our own limited perceptions, there is no reason to take sadness in them by adopting a cosmic perspective where all things are fleeting. “...Since the value of all this beauty and perfection is determined only by its significance for our own emotional lives, it has no need to survive us and is therefore independent of absolute duration.”<sup>46</sup>

Freud's conclusion is fascinating not only on its own terms, but is interesting to consider in relation to *The Wind Rises*, as both works are direct reactions to the trauma of war. Freud wrote "On Transience" in 1916, during World War I, and the piece is a conscious attempt to find in the current horrors of the world a possibility for optimism, a hope that humanity might someday be able to take strength and comfort in life once again. Freud describes his debate with the poet as occurring the summer before the war, on the brink of the moment this philosophy would be put to the test. Miyazaki is not telling his story in the midst of the Pacific War, instead reflecting back upon it and several other historical and fictionalized tragedies, but he is attempting to do the same thing, and so, in a sense, was Hori – to take stock of the world and all its greatness and flaws, and see if the melancholy created by such a mixture can ever be overcome. As a result, Freud's words shall prove enlightening moving forward.

This existential juxtaposition and the philosophies behind it are especially apparent in the mid-film interlude at Karuizawa,<sup>47</sup> where Jiro has travelled for a summer vacation after the failure of his first Zero prototype. Taking up just over 20 minutes of the film, a little less than one-sixth overall, and with virtually no advancement of the preexisting plotlines, this section plays like a short story situated within the larger narrative. On the surface, it is a tale of romance, with Jiro and Nahoko reuniting after their first meeting 10 years ago, reaffirming their love for each other and deciding to get married, her warm presence and affection amidst this gorgeous green countryside inspiring Jiro to get back on his feet and start pursuing his design dreams once again. But there is darkness here as well, and not just in the ominous premonitions of the mysterious Mr. Castorp, who lists off a string of Japan's recent aggressions to Jiro before declaring that "Japan will blow up."<sup>48</sup> Nahoko's tuberculosis is revealed before the end, Jiro has travelled here only because of failure,<sup>49</sup> and war is inevitably approaching; even in a remote,

isolated paradise such as this, the problems of reality cannot be ignored. In fact, Karuizawa serves as a sort of liminal space in which these characters contemplate the challenges of their lives and of society before finding the strength to move forward. It is the kind of storytelling that fuels Hori's *Kaze Tachinu* – a beauty-filled interlude that is fundamentally about characters dealing with vulnerability and trauma – and which graces Miyazaki's film throughout.

For in addition to generally leaving the darkness of the story sublimated, Hori often makes use of narrative ellipsis in presenting the most distressing plot turns, and it is this technique that Miyazaki appropriates most frequently in *The Wind Rises*.<sup>50</sup> Just as Hori will skip the story ahead after a particularly devastating moment – usually a violent coughing fit from Setsuko – or, conversely, go from one melancholy moment to the next, with something terrible having happened in between (Setsuko dies within one of these absences), Miyazaki represents many of the darkest moments or ideas in *The Wind Rises* through ellipsis. Sometimes they are literary in form – Jiro retuning to Nahoko's house in the aftermath of the earthquake, only to see that it, and the surrounding town, has burned down entirely in the interim – sometimes they are more cinematic – we do not see Nahoko have her lung hemorrhage, but when Jiro hears about it, a shot of her coughing up blood on a painting briefly intrudes – and occasionally they are a fusion of the two, such as the depiction of Jiro's arrival at Karuizawa; the film cuts from a seemingly successful flight test to Jiro arriving in the village, with an explanation only given several minutes later in the form of a short shot of Jiro standing over the wreckage of his plane.

*The Wind Rises* has courted its fair share of controversy since release, both at home and abroad – Japanese nationalists declared Miyazaki a “traitor” and “anti-Japanese” for its anti-war content, while viewers around the world, especially in South Korea (many of those forced into labor on production of the Zero were Korean), took umbrage with a positive depiction of the

deadly Zero fighter's inventor – and while most of these grievances fail to take into account the nuances of the film itself, the most unfounded assertions are those that accuse the film of evading difficult historical issues.<sup>51</sup> Miyazaki does not, as we have seen, run away from the horrors of World War II in the film, nor of Japan's role in it. He merely refrains from letting this content overwhelm the picture, using ellipsis and sublimation to let the darkest ideas sting. And indeed, moments like Jiro imaging warplanes flying over a burning Tokyo after the Earthquake, or the cut from the successful test flight of the Zero prototype to an assortment of planes flying over a smoking Japanese countryside at the end of the film – the entirety of the war contained within the gap – pierce like a knife. Were these moments extended, allowed to dominate the picture's tone, they would hardly have the same impact; it is only by creating an atmosphere of gentle wonder that the dark intrusions – destruction, terminal illness, personal failure, etc. – can be so powerfully felt. For both Hori and Miyazaki, the dichotomy of life is illuminated in the interludes.

There is one sequence, however, for which Miyazaki resolutely refuses to use ellipsis: the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, a magnificently rendered set piece that may be the single most formally accomplished sequence of his entire film career. Apart from ominous images in Jiro's childhood fantasy sequences, this is the film's first instance of trauma and destruction, coming only fifteen minutes into the film, and also its greatest, the only disaster – personal, professional, or cultural – to be depicted in full, meticulous detail.

The sequence is presaged by a series of stunning landscape shots, as the train Jiro rides – and upon which he first met a young Nahoko moments earlier – speeds through the countryside, a vast expanse of lush green land, with rolling hills and mountain ranges shadowed in purple by a swirling mass of dark clouds above.<sup>52</sup> In another landscape, the train crosses a bridge, where

deep blue rivers divvy up the countryside. We are gazing upon the land in pristine condition, before it is sullied by natural disaster, a sort of aesthetic calm before the storm.

Suddenly, the film abruptly cuts to a dark spot far beneath the earth; a fiery red crack splits the solid brown hue asunder, spreading rapidly and ferociously. Above, a shockwave blasts through coastal Tokyo and on into the countryside. A closer shot level with the city shows the buildings and earth rising in waves, as if some enormous monster is trampling through the earth beneath them, forcing everything on land to leap high into the air. As the buildings continue to roll violently, the wave reaches the tracks, and Jiro's train is bucked to a fierce stop. Jiro, holding desperately to the bars at the edge of the compartment, sees a house subsumed into the earth as the land continues to rock. The sound of the quake is deafening, a chorus of hellish voices droning in low, menacing tones, as if the beast underground is humming while it rampages.<sup>53</sup> Finally, everything calms. A hazy sea of smoke has settled over the city. The initial intensity has passed, but it is only the beginning of the sequence, only the first moments of the struggle Japan faces.

There is no music throughout this scene, and the editing is slow and deliberate. We follow Jiro's perspective as he helps Nahoko and her attendant, who has broken her leg in the quake, but through Jiro's eyes, we are treated to a visual story of displaced multitudes. As Jiro and the other passengers start to move away from the train and up to higher ground, the wind begins to rise, heralding the spread of fires. Every time we look upon the city, more flames have erupted, and more smoke – an eerie, golden-brown – has been thrust into the sky. In the sequence's most horrific shot, the camera pans slowly down from the heavens, where colossal billowing smoke clouds consume the atmosphere, to the ruined city, its horizon line lit by the bright, ferocious red of fire, glowing orange embers floating through the air like snow; a dense

mass of people is assembled as far away from the fire as they can get. Yet Jiro and Nahoko are rushing into the city to find help, where we see shots of literally hundreds of human figures – an absurdly vast amount for traditional animation, and as shown in *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*, the individual movements of all of them were carefully considered – all carrying luggage or escorting horses, bustling through the smoky, debris-filled air. Sunken buildings and structures torn asunder frame every moment. The sky is brown with decay, as if it has died and started rotting. Finally, after Jiro and Nahoko find help, music returns to the film, signaling not the end of the disaster, but the start of reconstruction. The earthquake sequence itself depicts the moment of impact and the initial shock and confusion; what comes next is groups of people organizing to put out fires and manage the chaos. The wind rises violently, and then Japan gets back on its feet and tries to live.



The control Miyazaki exerts over this sequence is absolutely masterful. Every terrifying image is not only spectacularly rendered, but allowed to linger, the meticulous evocation of devastation making the horror and confusion infectious. Supervising Animator Kitaro Kosaka reports that the scene was in part constructed from Miyazaki's vivid memories of experiencing the air raids in Utsonomiya when he was young;<sup>54</sup> the immersion is indeed so all-consuming and traumatic that it must come from personal experience. The sequence is impactful enough on its own that ellipsis suffice throughout the rest of the picture. We are given a flavor of national tragedy, and the emotions that scar us during this sequence rise back to the surface whenever Miyazaki offers a fleeting glimpse into other disasters.

It even brings to mind a calamity outside the direct periphery of the film's story – the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, the only recorded quake in Japan of greater magnitude than the one of 1923, and which caused more deaths and destruction in the country than any event since the end of the Pacific War. The disaster struck only one day after Miyazaki had finished storyboarding the Great Kanto Earthquake sequence.<sup>55</sup> By the time the film came out in July of 2013, the quake and tsunami would of course still be fresh in the minds of the Japanese public, making this sequence more vital than ever. It is the one moment that could never be reduced to an ellipsis, for it, more than any other part of the film, powerfully connects the past to the present, making the film's themes of living through hardship intensely palpable to the domestic audience. If Japan could make it through this, then they can still survive today; if the wind rose then, Japan must continue striving to live now. Like Freud urging humanity to have hope that beauty shall return to the world in the midst of World War I, Miyazaki is telling Japan that this trauma too shall be endured.



As far as the sequence functions within the film's structure, it is important that Jiro and Nahoko's first meeting comes here. Their lives together are bookended by a fusion of fiction and reality; she is not real, and Jiro's involvement with her during the earthquake is fantasy, but the disaster itself is all too factual. The earthquake set piece is one of those moments where the central themes of the film are felt most powerfully, and it is no coincidence that it is also a scene in which the film's component parts and sources – history, memory, and fantasy; ecstasy, tragedy, and determination – are blended most effectively. After Jiro and Nahoko separate, the blend too comes apart; Jiro is on his own for the next 45 minutes, the film focusing on history and his professional career, providing Miyazaki's reflections on creativity along the way. Afterwards, he spends 20 minutes in Karuizawa with Nahoko, the film depicting a fiction of his personal life informed by Tatsuo Hori. From there, the separate pieces begin to converge once more. When Nahoko has her lung hemorrhage, and Jiro rushes to be by her side, there is a poignant scene where he begins to weep while trying to work on a design, the tears flowing uncontrollably onto his papers. In that moment, his professional and personal lives clash uncomfortably.

Later, when Nahoko leaves the sanitarium to come live with Jiro in the city, the lines between the two sides of the film blur even further. Their wedding sequence, performed at the house of Jiro's superior, Kurokawa, while Jiro is in hiding from the Secret Police, contains a succession of images that look as though they belong in one of the film's fantasy sequences. Mrs. Kurokawa leads Nahoko through the house's outdoor hallway towards the wedding location, the light of her paper lamp illuminating Nahoko in the cool night air, a small assortment of snowflakes falling softly around them. Even though the light source is clear, Nahoko, dressed in a white kimono with pink gown and sash, seems to exude a sort of otherworldly glow, her dark

hair transformed into a deep, rich blue. When she arrives in the brighter environment of the house interior, her luminescence only increases; the hue of her hair looks even deeper, and her gown is now a warm, vivid red. She does not look ill in the slightest; in fact, she hardly looks real. The image of her being led along the path at night is like something out of a dream – which, in a sense, is exactly what she is, a character drawn from fiction and inserted into the life of a historical figure. After the wedding, having this literal ‘dream woman’ by his side inspires Jiro to do his best creative work, bringing the Zero project over the finish line due in part to the support and inspiration she provides. Fantasy is, as the film has continually demonstrated, that which gives a creative person strength; if Nahoko herself is a dream, then being with her only intensifies Jiro’s creative passion.<sup>56</sup>



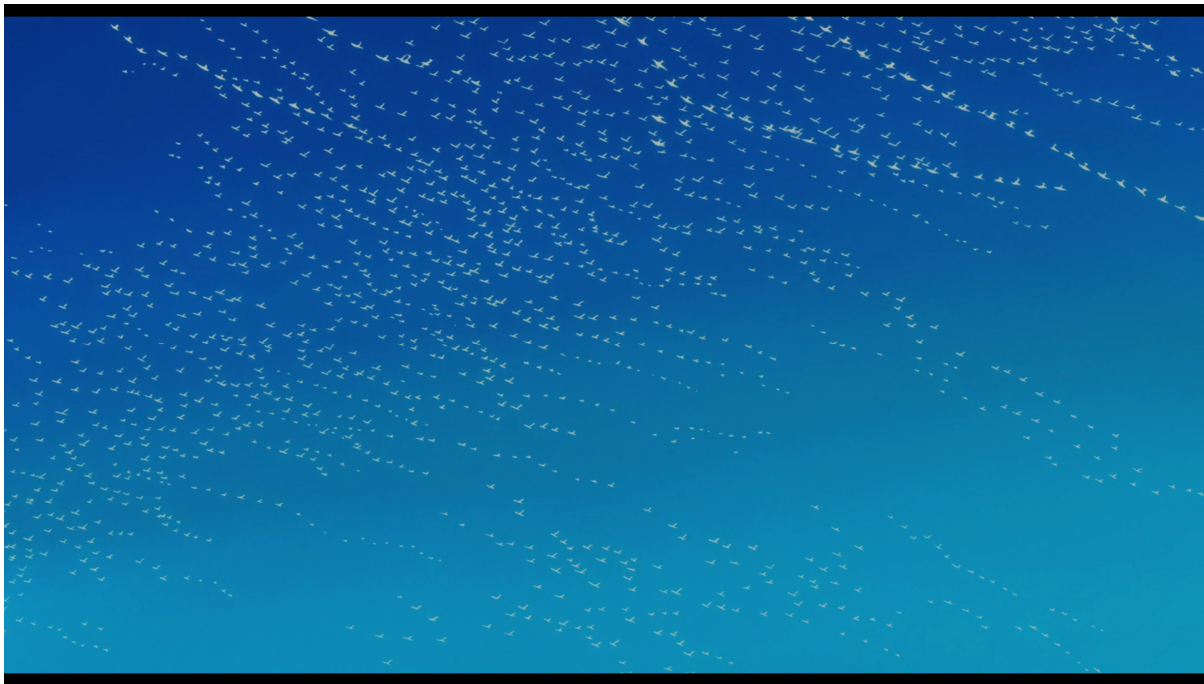
It is significant, then, that their life together ends at the moment Jiro’s plane finally takes successful flight. The bookend to their first meeting during the earthquake, it is another scene in which the film’s component parts blend seamlessly, the reality of the Zero’s invention intersecting with the fiction of Nahoko’s death – triumph and tragedy interwoven once more. As the Zero<sup>57</sup> soars through the sky, swooping nimbly over rivers lined with cherry blossoms and passing gracefully through clouds, its agile majesty on full display, Jiro watches intently from the ground alongside his colleagues. The plane’s speed is unparalleled, and as it comes in for a landing, the achievement of Jiro’s invention is obvious to all. Suddenly, all sound drops out of

the film, save for a forceful gust of wind. Jiro's face turns away from the Zero to look at the mountains, a mixture of terror and astonishment on his face. Even as the sound fades back in, the crowd from Mitsubishi cheering wildly, Jiro can only focus on the mysterious force that has grabbed his attention. It is another moment of ellipsis. Though we do not see it, Nahoko has died; the wind literally rose to let Jiro know. At the moment he has reached his personal pinnacle of creative accomplishment, his greatest source of light and fantasy has disappeared. It is perhaps the clearest illustration of duality in the film, both a statement on the cursed reality of Jiro's invention and a reflection of life's capacity to deliver us triumph and disaster in equal measure.

In the ellipsis that follows, fading hauntingly from the celebration at the airfield to planes soaring over an immense explosion of wartime smoke, the years of the Zero Fighter's glory and devastation have come and gone. The film cuts to a graveyard of airplane wreckage, a vast sea of dark, contorted masses of steel, with the embers of fire still burning amongst them. Through this desolation walks Jiro, until he arrives at a grassy plane – the same dreamscape from his earlier fantasy sequences with Caproni, the grass still vibrant and the clouds still tinged in their comforting golden-brown hue. Yet now the fantasy is tainted, the landscape littered with the wreckage of dead planes. His dead planes. He still wears the same grey suit and blue tie from the day of the Zero's test flight. One imagines Jiro has been wandering this liminal space for years now, bound by what he has lost, unable to reconcile the damage wrought upon his kingdom of dreams.

Caproni waits for him a little ways beyond. "Those ten years in the sun, did you live them to the full?" asks the Count. "Yes," answers Jiro. "Things fell apart toward the end, though." While there is still beauty in this space, the clouds passing peacefully behind them as always, Jiro looks far sadder and more defeated than we have ever seen him. The vitality has gone from

his eyes. “That’s what it means to lose a war,” Caproni responds, then turns to look at something coming from the horizon. “There’s your Zero fighter.” Jiro turns to look as well, and they see a small fleet of Zeros zooming across the grass, only a little ways above the ground. They are neither dead, nor decayed, nor committing acts of destruction, but instead soaring in their idealized forms, as arbiters for Jiro’s dreams of flight. They glide off towards the sunset, which lights a cool orange flame beneath the clouds, and then up to the highest point in the sky, where they join a seemingly infinite amount of simple paper planes – a heavenly assortment of ruined aircraft, dead pilots, and intangible dreams, gone to live eternally in the sky.<sup>58</sup>



“Beautiful. A masterful design,” Caproni praises. “Not a single plane returned,” Jiro reflects mournfully. “There was nothing to come back to,” counters Caproni. “Airplanes are beautiful dreams, cursed dreams...waiting for the sky to swallow them up.” Caproni is giving voice to what they just witnessed – that with any form of majesty or accomplishment comes an inevitable transience. A beauty that is fleetingly tangible before disappearing to an unknowable space. Like the scene described by Freud, with Caproni playing philosopher to Jiro’s melancholy

poet, Caproni pushes his young friend to see the dynamism of this life he has led, rather than just the grief. Airplanes have, after all, been Jiro's dream since childhood, and he has spent his life accessing all they represent through fantasy and imagination; how could he now expect them to be anything other than what they are?

Caproni redirects Jiro's attention to the other loss he must come to terms with. "Someone is waiting for you," he says, and from the field laid out before them emerges Nahoko, parasol in hand, her yellow dress blowing in the breeze. "She's been waiting here for a long time," Caproni explains. Nahoko addresses Jiro with a gentle smile. "Darling, you must live," she tells him. "You must live."<sup>59</sup> Her presence, arriving so shortly after the Zeros, makes the connection between Jiro's creativity and his romance explicit, for both Jiro and the viewer: Her love, like his aeronautical dreams, was a fleeting, beautiful fantasy, its impermanence both devastating and beautiful. She has come now to free him from this liminal space, her appearance and her words telling him that it is okay to go on living – that he can feel this grief, guilt, and pain, but also remember the beauty and wonder of what he had. One cannot overwhelm the other – to truly live, Jiro must move forward with this duality alive in his heart. As must we all. A dream can be cursed and still give us hope. To live is to acknowledge this reality.

Nahoko is swept up in the wind and disappears. "She is gone," says Caproni. "She was beautiful, like the wind." Jiro is overcome with emotion. "Thank you," he mutters, clenching his eyes and holding back tears. "Thank you." He is free.

So, in a sense, is Hayao Miyazaki. Here, in the final scene of his final film – and short of having a character literally read out a retirement announcement, this sequence is as reflexive a farewell as any auteur could ever give – Miyazaki has found a moment of conflicted but meaningful absolution, rectifying both the personal questions of creative unease and the broader

issues of humanity's destructive resilience that have troubled him for so long. By simply acknowledging and accepting the transient, dualistic nature of both artistry and life, he ends his career on a note of peace and hope, in a place that tells us we can and must endure amidst the contradictions. Like Freud, Miyazaki looks upon the devastation of war and the pain that living brings, and he finds a way to perceive beauty in the chaos and impermanence of existence, rather than succumb to the melancholy impulse transience invites.

For life, like creativity, is akin to an airplane's vapor trail. Visible and formless, palpable and intangible, it is forever evident and perpetually unknowable – but this does not mean we should not chase it; in turning our backs on the pain and confusion of reality, or of our own creative impulses, we would only miss out on the wonder and ecstasy of existence. And for a director whose films are best known for celebrating just that, no matter the filmmaker's own personal doubt and cynicism, the choice of any other path than that of living – and, indeed, creating – would feel wrong. The vapor trail must be chased.

"You must live," Caproni reassures Jiro as the engineer collects himself. "First, shall we drop by my house? I have some excellent wine." Caproni walks off into the limitless green expanse laid out before them. Jiro looks up into the sky, gazing trance-like at the passing clouds as though he has never fully noticed their majesty, before following. The film fades, and animation's greatest career comes to a close. It too was beautiful, just like the wind.

## Endnotes

1. Hayao Miyazaki, “Using a Bucket to Pour Water on a Flood,” in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 56.
2. Studio Ghibli, *The Art of The Wind Rises*, trans. Jocelyne Allen (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 13.  
Horikoshi’s age is never stated in the film, but the section in Ghibli’s art book on this scene ages him at thirteen.
3. Ibid., 27
4. Ibid. The Zeppelin’s German origin can be identified by the German/Prussian iron cross on its underside; this airship was completed in 1900, and while it was originally designed to transport passengers, the LZ1 became a weapon with the start of World War I (this idea – planes that could be used for passengers instead being employed in war – recur a few times in the film). With 120 produced for the war, it would likely have been well-known to an aviation enthusiast like Jiro.
5. The quote originates from Valéry’s poem “The Graveyard by the Sea” (*Le Cimetière marin*). This English translation, taken from the film’s subtitles, is not an exact translation of the French, the first part of which would instead read “The wind has risen.” The Japanese version of the quote (and, thus, translated into English in the film subtitles), written by Tatsuo Hori, uses the words “Kaze Tachinu” (also the title of Hori’s story and the film), which is in a present-tense form – “The wind is rising” or “The wind rises.”
6. Some other examples: *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, while Miyazaki’s most black-and-white good-and-evil narrative – featuring a clear, unambiguously evil antagonist – is both a stirring adventure film and a touching story about children standing up to the worst of mankind, choosing to do the right thing even when circumstances become overwhelmingly bleak. *Porco Rosso* follows an Italian fighter pilot in the Adriatic, haunted by memories of World War I, trying to live by his own set of ethics as fascism overtakes Italy (an ideological distance from his surroundings symbolized by the transformation of his face into that of a pig). The title character of *Howl’s Moving Castle* is a pacifist at heart forced into fighting when war plagues the land, reality overpowering his personal philosophies. Even *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* (2008), Miyazaki’s simplest story, features a young protagonist marked by the absence of his sailor father. Learning to live amidst the imperfections of reality is one of the core commonalities that links all of Miyazaki’s work.

7. Miyazaki's retirement was first announced by Studio Ghibli president Koji Hoshino on September 1st, 2013, at the Venice Film Festival, where *The Wind Rises* was making its international debut. Miyazaki later held a press conference personally announcing his decision on September 6th, in Tokyo. Whether or not he went into *The Wind Rises* treating it as his final film is unknown – the way Miyazaki works, not starting production with a completed script or storyboards and instead following the story where it leads him, I would not assume it was a conscious choice from the beginning – and the announcement has met with skepticism from many fans and critics, considering that Miyazaki has voiced retirement intentions on several prior occasions, most notably after *Princess Mononoke*. Nevertheless, I tend to trust him this time – due both to his age (72) and the extra formality with which this announcement was made – and the sheer barrage of career reflexivity on display in *The Wind Rises* leads me to believe he must have chosen this as his final project somewhere along the way (he discusses quitting film several times in the documentary *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*, a film chronicling the creation of *The Wind Rises*, though to be fair, Miyazaki has spoken like that in most published interviews or communications for all his films going back to *Princess Mononoke*; the stress of feature animation takes its toll).

8. While many of Miyazaki's films are based on various external source materials, *The Wind Rises* is arguably the only one where it is truly necessary to analyze the sources in depth. Usually, with films such as *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, or *Whisper of the Heart* (the first two based on books, the third on a manga), Miyazaki will just use a premise or some basic details as a jumping-off point before transforming the story into something completely of his own invention. With *The Wind Rises*, his engagement with the sources is much deeper and more complex.

9. Jiro Horikoshi was born in 1903, Tatsuo Hori in 1904.

10. Masatake Okumiya, Jiro Horikoshi, and Martin Caidin, *Zero!* (New York: E.P Dutton & Co., 1956), 13.

11. Jiro Horikoshi, *Eagles of Mitsubishi*, trans. Shojiro Shindo and Harold N. Wantiez (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), v.

12. *Ibid.*, v, vi.

13. All dialogue quotes from the film in this chapter are derived from the English-language subtitle track on the 2014 "Studio Ghibli ga ippai (Collection)" Japanese Blu-Ray release, translated by Jim Hubbert and Rieko Izutsu-Vajira Sarn.



14. Not to mention a complete dismissal of Western animation. “... I must say that I hate Disney's works,” Miyazaki said in 1988. “The barrier to both the entry and the exit of Disney films is too low and too wide. To me, they show nothing but contempt for the audience” (Hayao Miyazaki, “Thoughts on Japanese Animation,” in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 56). When asked in 1998 about his influences as an animator, Miyazaki rejected Disney films as a source for inspiration, saying that while he admired the technique of films like *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, and *Fantasia*, “their depiction of the inner thoughts of human beings was so simplistic that I didn't enjoy them very much.” Hayao Miyazaki, “Forty-four Questions on *Princess Mononoke* for Director Hayao Miyazaki from International Journalists at the Berlin International Film Festival,” in *Turning Point: 1997-2008*, trans. Beth Carey and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 92.
15. Hayao Miyazaki, “My Point of Origin,” in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 48.
16. Miyazaki, “Thoughts on Japanese Animation,” 71.
17. Miyazaki, “Using a Bucket,” 53.
18. Miyazaki, “Thoughts on Japanese Animation,” 72.
19. Hayao Miyazaki, “All I Want Is to Maintain a Workplace to Create Good Movies,” in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 87.
20. Miyazaki, “All I Want,” 86-91.
21. Miyazaki, “My Point of Origin,” 48.
22. Miyazaki, “Thoughts on Japanese Animation,” 84.
23. After the war, Horikoshi, like many in Japan, was outwardly critical of his country's aggressions during the Pacific War, as expressed in his books *Zero!* and *Eagles of Mitsubishi*. Some of his most powerful thoughts on the war, and his emotions toward it, are expressed in his personal diaries, excerpts of which were published in *Zero!* In an entry dated March 12th, 1945, less than half a year before the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and during the height of America's strategic bombing raids of Japan, Horikoshi describes sending his family away for safety, and the thoughts that come into his head now that he is left alone:

It was strange to be alone in this empty house while my wife is at Ozone Station in Nagoya seeing off the family. It was a time for thought, and I felt a deep concern about the future life of my family and my people, about our jobs, the future of the company with which I had worked so long. When I thought of the inevitable course the war would follow, the certain defeat of my country and its people, I could not prevent

the tears from coming. I must confess in these pages that the misery which is in store for Japan has caused me to cry; I was unable to stop the tears.

When we awoke on the morning of December 8, 1941, we found ourselves – without any foreknowledge – to be embroiled in war. The realization was astonishing. Since then, the majority of us who had truly understood the awesome industrial strength of the United States never really believed that Japan would win this war. We were convinced that surely our government had in mind some diplomatic measures which would bring the conflict to a halt before the situation became catastrophic for Japan. But now, bereft of any strong government move to seek a diplomatic out, we are being driven to doom. Japan is being destroyed. I cannot do other but to blame the military hierarchy and the blind politicians in power for dragging Japan into this hellish cauldron of defeat. (Okmiya, Horikoshi, and Caidin, *Zero!*, 401-2)

24. Horikoshi, *Eagles of Mitsubishi*, 147.

25. Moeko Fujii, “Miyazaki’s Film ‘The Wind Rises’ Spurring Mixed Emotions,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July

26th, 2013, [http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2013/07/26/miyazakis-film-the-wind-rises-spurring-mixed-](http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2013/07/26/miyazakis-film-the-wind-rises-spurring-mixed-emotions/)

[emotions/](http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2013/07/26/miyazakis-film-the-wind-rises-spurring-mixed-emotions/). The quote originates from a 2011 issue of *Cut Magazine*, a Japanese publication, translated and cited in the *Wall Street Journal* article.

26. The scene in which Jiro stands up to and fights off the bullies, only to be reminded later by his mother that

“fighting is never justified,” is a curious one. Whether or not there is any historical precedent for this sequence in

Horikoshi’s life is unknown to me, but if one treats the film as a biographical portrait of the man, the presentation of such strongly formative ethics of justice and pathos borders on hagiography. That is not, as I have argued, the most effective way to interpret the film – this character is a fictional combination of both Horikoshi and Tatsuo Hori, with

a lot of Miyazaki’s own personality thrown into the mix – and the significance of the scene is less about sanctifying

Horikoshi than it is establishing the theme of personal and creative compromise early on. These are ideals the

character lives by that he will have to give up at some point, or at least learn to live in conflict with, if he is to be an

airplane engineer, and establishing this untenable moral framework in the opening stages creates a crucial sense of

contrast for the rest of the picture.

27. This character is an invention of the film. The real Horikoshi had an elder brother, not a younger sister.

28. Studio Ghibli, *The Art of The Wind Rises*, 44.

29. One could argue that Kurokawa, Jiro’s boss at Mitsubishi, also serves the adult mentor role in the film, as he too supports Jiro’s creativity during times of struggle, giving Jiro a place to stay at his home when Jiro is being hunted

by the secret police, or officiating Jiro and Nahoko’s wedding. But he is, overall, a much more prickly and less

outwardly supportive character than Osono, Nishi, or even Caproni, and while this could be another function of Jiro

being an adult – and thus necessitating a different kind of mentor than Kiki or Shizuku had – Caproni is, overall, the

clearer thematic descendent of Osono and Nishi.

30. This is far from the only parallel the film draws between aeronautical engineering and animation. The frequent images of Jiro hunched over at his desk, sketching furiously with pencil in hand is the common visual of the Japanese animator; Jiro's office at Mitsubishi even looks a bit like the interior of Studio Ghibli. Both animator and engineer work in similar environments, doing similar tasks: imagining something that does not exist, and putting it down on paper so that it might become tangible. It is unlikely anyone but Hayao Miyazaki, with his unique blend of passion for animation and aircraft history, would ever make the connection between animating and engineering, but *The Wind Rises* makes a strong argument for the comparison.

31. From *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*, filmed at a press conference for the announcement of *The Wind Rises* in December 2012. This and all other quotes from the documentary in this section are translated by Taro Goto.

32. Hayao Miyazaki, "From Idea to Film, Part II: 2," in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 45.

33. Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation – Films, Themes, Artistry* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 26.

34. Hayao Miyazaki, "My Old Man's Back," in *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009), 208-9.

35. This scene is incredibly poignant and interesting, and deserves further mention here. The letter Miyazaki receives describes a story from the writer's boyhood, during the war, when he and his family were displaced after their home was destroyed. They were evacuated to the same city as Miyazaki's family, and came to Miyazaki's father looking for shelter. The elder Miyazaki not only let them in, but gave them chocolates – a treat the younger Miyazaki notes he himself was never offered. "Being welcomed rather than being turned out probably shaped the way this man looked at the world," Miyazaki muses. "Meanwhile, my father got rich selling airplane parts. What a contradiction...but he gave the kid chocolate. It was nice to hear." Miyazaki writes the man a return letter, which gives us poignant insight into Miyazaki's memories of the war, thoughts on his father's actions, and the reflexive mood he was in while animating *The Wind Rises*:

Thank you for the letter and book. I should've replied immediately, but was delayed as I got caught up with work. I apologize. Your letter brought back memories of the night of the air raids. That night, when my mother woke me, the window was aglow as if from sunset. My brother and I put our legs in a ditch under a bridge, and mats were propped up to protect us. It was so hot and painful that I sometimes wonder how we managed to survive or not lose our house in a fire. Eventually we were freed from the pressure and my father, brother and I sat in the back of a truck. A mother with a little girl asked to join us, and the fact we left them behind has haunted me for many years. My mother has also said something similar. But I feel no anger toward my father. Just a thorn in my heart. The chocolate story is very much like my father, my wife

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says. That's the kind of man he was. When climbing up the riverbank, my uncle took one brother while my mother took another. My father held a bag in one hand and carried me in the other, slipping many times as he tried to climb the embankment. He apologized each time he slipped. I thought I could climb on my own, but I kept my mouth shut. My father was desperately trying to protect his family, I believe. Thank you very much for the letter. I feel like I've rediscovered my father. Thank you. Hayao Miyazaki.

36. Hayao Miyazaki, "Sacrifices of the Sky," in *Turning Point: 1997-2008*, trans. Beth Carey and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 180.

37. This was a common practice during Japan's early industrial days, initiated by Emperor Meiji in the 1880s, sending engineers and intellectuals out into the world to learn from other, more developed nations. The practice would of course stop by the onset of World War II, as Japan shut itself off from the rest of the world. This is likely the reason Jiro is hunted by the secret police in the latter portion of the film; having spent copious amounts of time outside Japan, he is a relic of an earlier era.

38. Of course I cannot stick by my own assertion here, and must ponder the issue some more. If we were to take the 'ten years' statement at face value, as a line reflective of Miyazaki's own beliefs, then there must be a ten-year period of his career he would consider his most fruitful or important. I would identify the years 1984 – 1994 as his greatest sustained artistic period, as it contains the films *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and *Porco Rosso*, all of which are masterworks and classics. If we fudge the timing a little bit, we could maybe include 1995's *Whisper of the Heart*. But no matter what, we would lose *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*, arguably his greatest and most universally acclaimed works. Certainly they cannot fall outside Miyazaki's 'ten years' of creativity, and adjusting the timeline to suit them – 1991-2001 – would leave us with only *Porco Rosso*, *Mononoke*, *Whisper*, and *Spirited*, a less productive period overall. Then again, if Miyazaki actually intended some sort of concrete statement about his career here, it is likely he would disagree with my math entirely, as he probably has a wholly different view of his works than any of his fans. For all we know, he could mean the 1970s, when he did his most prominent television work, or the 2000s, when he made the films *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, and *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*, the latter two generally considered to be slightly lesser works in his canon, but which he, for all we know, could feel the strongest personal connection to. It could even be the creation of the original *Nausicaä* manga, which was serialized intermittently over a period of 12 years, but might be close enough to count. This mathematical going around in circles is why it might be best to let the enigma remain mysterious. Probing deeper will not give us any satisfying answers.

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39. Modern scholarship has cast doubt over the popular legend of slaves being forced to build the Egyptian pyramids. Archeological findings of the living quarters of pyramid builders, along with other discoveries, has turned the tide of scholarly opinion away from the slavery theory, which was based on assumptions as to the amount of labor needed for pyramid building rather than actual evidence. It is likely safe to say, however, that this does not change the meaning or interpretation of Caproni's allusion; Miyazaki is clearly invoking the pyramids for our popular conception of them, which still involves slavery. The point Caproni makes stands, even if he is historically dating and contradicting himself. Jonathan Shaw, "Who Built the Pyramids?" *Harvard Magazine*, July-August 2003, <http://harvardmagazine.com/2003/07/who-built-the-pyramids.html>.
40. The film thus deviates completely from the historical arc of Jiro Horikoshi's non-professional existence; the real Horikoshi, for instance, was married and had children both throughout and after the war.
41. Tatsuo Hori, *The Wind Has Risen (Kaze Tachinu)*, in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. Francis B. Tenny, ed. J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 204.
42. Hori, *The Wind Has Risen*, 203
43. R.W. Hepburn, "Wonder," in *'Wonder' and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 140.
44. Sigmund Freud, "On Transience," in *Character and Culture* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 148.
45. *Ibid.*, 149.
46. *Ibid.*
47. A real Japanese resort town, popular with foreigners, which Tatsuo Hori often visited, and which is presumably the village the narrator travels to at the end of *Kaze Tachinu*. Hori, "The Wind Has Risen," 231.
48. Castorp is named after the main character of this section's other literary antecedent: *The Magic Mountain*, by Thomas Mann, in which protagonist Hans Castorp, before embarking on his professional career, goes to visit a remote sanitarium where his cousin, a tuberculosis patient, is staying. It is also a pre-war story (albeit the previous war, World War I), and Castorp, like Jiro, meets many fascinating people and finds himself unable to leave, drawn to the remote location and its lack of worldly responsibilities. Miyazaki's Castorp even references the Mann novel directly. While named for the Mann character, Castorp himself is modeled after and voiced by Steve Alpert, a Ghibli executive who worked in the studio's overseas division. As an American, Alpert's stilted Japanese line readings give the character a wonderfully mysterious, foreign quality. Amusingly, in Disney's English-language dub of the film,

Werner Herzog was hired to voice the character; with all respect to Alpert, once one has heard Herzog's amazingly idiosyncratic voice coming from Castorp, it is hard to imagine the character any other way. Studio Ghibli, *The Art of the Wind Rises*, 174.

49. Though not directly alluded to in the film, two test flights of Horikoshi's Zero prototypes resulted in the deaths of pilots, the first in March of 1940, the second in April of 1941. While these deaths are out of chronology for where Jiro's vacation takes place – since Jiro and Nahoko met during the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and reunite after 10 years apart, these scenes would exist in 1933 – there could be a sublimated allusion to the human cost of inventing and testing the Zero (let alone what it went on to do) contained within this sequence. Horikoshi, *Eagles of Mitsubishi*, 84-5, 110-3.

50. Ellipsis also serve as an additional connection to the work of Yasujiro Ozu, the Japanese director who most prominently employed narrative ellipsis in his films, and whose style, as previously discussed, bears traces in much of Miyazaki's work. Ozu's iconic *Tokyo Story* (1953), for instance, skips over the development of the mother's fatal illness (and, later, the moment of her death), even though it is the driving force of the film's second half, and pictures like *Late Spring* (1949), *Equinox Flower* (1958), and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962), while built around marriage plots, do not depict the eventual marriage ceremony (*Late Spring* and *An Autumn Afternoon* do not even show the groom). A most extreme example might be *Tokyo Twilight* (1957), in which the ostensible protagonist, a young troubled woman, is injured off-screen, and then dies in an ellipsis, leaving the other characters to grapple with her absence in the film's final half-hour. In all cases, Ozu's ellipsis serve two primary functions: To add an emotional sting to the event skipped via acknowledgement of the moment's inevitability (or, conversely, through surprise of its happening), and to focus more intensely on the emotional fallout of what the ellipsis contains. To Ozu, a director consumed with stories and lives most would deem 'unremarkable,' the reaction to an event is vastly more important than the event itself, and says much more about the human condition. While this is not a technique Miyazaki commonly employs in his films, it is on full display in *The Wind Rises*, and serves an identical purpose. For a historical film in which all the tragedies depicted are inevitable, what matters most is how the characters are marked by grief and loss; like Ozu's work, *The Wind Rises* is more powerful for these absences.

51. Justin McCurry, "Japanese animator under fire for film tribute to warplane designer," *The Guardian*, August 22nd, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/23/hayao-miyazaki-film-wind-rises>; Sam Byford, "'The

Wind Rises': the beauty and controversy of Miyazaki's final film," *The Verge*, January 23rd, 2014,

<http://www.theverge.com/2014/1/23/5337826/the-wind-rises-the-beauty-and-controversy-of-miyazakis-final-film>.

52. Such is the absurdly exacting historical detail of the film that even these clouds, apparently, are accurate; clouds were heavy that day due to a recent typhoon. Studio Ghibli, *The Art of the Wind Rises*, 68.

53. Quite literally a chorus – Miyazaki's unusual approach to sound design on the film (he mixed it in mono) included having voice actors perform many of the sound effects, a technique akin to Kabuki theatre. It adds a haunted tone to many of the film's most ominous moments. For instance, when the engine of Jiro's initial Zero prototype (the one that fails) is charged for the first time, a chorus of voices chants with increasing depth and volume until the propeller kicks into action. It sounds as if a demon is being awoken; in some sense, one is.

54. Studio Ghibli, *The Art of The Wind Rises*, 71.

55. Ibid., 11.

56. It is a bit unfortunate that for a director whose works are so often marked by wonderfully three-dimensional female characters, the female lead of Miyazaki's final film be largely symbolic, a striking visual design without much individual personality or agency. Much of this simply comes from the Tatsuo Hori story Nahoko originates from, and I do not believe either Hori or Miyazaki are making any generalized statements about gender roles with the character – if Miyazaki were, Jiro's little sister, Kayo, would not be striving to become a doctor in Tokyo in pre-war Japan – but it is of course worth noting that Nahoko exists primarily to further Jiro's arc. This is not to say Nahoko lacks strength – the decisions she makes, about living her life to the fullest with what little time she has left, are tremendously brave and difficult ones – but the absorption of her femininity and individual identity into a sort of real-world fantasy space for Jiro runs closer towards problematic gender stereotypes than Miyazaki has ever done before. It does not strike me as overly imbalanced in the context of Miyazaki's entire filmography – Seiji in *Whisper of the Heart* is even less of a character than Nahoko, and exists solely for the purpose of giving Shizuku inspiration and motivation, meaning this kind of character isn't limited to one gender – but when viewing *The Wind Rises* on its own, the gender perspective feels narrower than is characteristic of Miyazaki's work.

57. This plane is still, technically, a prototype of the actual Zero, called the '9-shi.' The plane commonly referred to as the Zero – the Mitsubishi A6M – only appears in the final fantasy sequence. Studio Ghibli, *The Art of the Wind Rises*, 219.

58. This image is a clear visual callback to a similar scene in *Porco Rosso*, which happens to be my personal favorite scene in Miyazaki's filmography – and, by extension, my favorite movie moment of all time. In it, Porco – an ace fighter pilot from the first world war, whose face has been transformed by a curse into that of a pig's – is checking individual bullets for his plane late at night when he is asked by his young companion, Fio, to tell her a story. Porco recounts a tale from the war, when he and his unit were out on patrol over the Adriatic. In a quiet, almost dream-like sequence, they become engaged in combat with enemy fighters, and Porco loses his entire unit, including his best friend Berlini, who had been married only two days prior. As Porco struggles to fight on his own, everything goes white around him, and though he finds himself lacking the strength to steer, the plane pilots itself up through the clouds to what looks like another world, a world comprised of nothing but sky, and is entirely quiet. Like Karuizawa, or Jiro's tainted fantasy world, it is another liminal space. Above, Porco sees a mysterious contrail stretch infinitely in both directions. Suddenly, next to Porco, Berlini's plane rises silently through the cloud line, followed by all the other planes in Porco's unit. Porco calls for them to stay, and is confused and scared as to why they rise – but they keep flying, higher and higher, and there is nothing Porco can do. The planes join the contrail – a closer shot shows that it is comprised of thousands of fighter planes, from all nationalities, flying silently, eternally, through the air. The music is a soft, ethereal hum, and the image is both breathtaking and heart-wrenching. Continuing to protest, wanting to join the other pilots, Porco's plane lowers back beneath the cloud line. "Heaven wasn't ready for you," comforts Fio. "I think God was telling me to fly alone forever," Porco replies in his characteristically jaded fashion. Fio assures him he's a good person. "The good ones are all dead," Porco casually shoots back. "And maybe what I saw was Hell."

It is a tremendously beautiful and thought-provoking sequence that operates on a number of levels, primarily as an intense visual expression of the eternally confusing costs of war and the guilt felt by survivors. It is also, on a more fundamental level, a moment about loss – about parting ways with people you are not ready to lose, watching them drift into a great unknown while you are forced to stay behind. My father and I watched many of Miyazaki's films together. *Porco Rosso* was the last one. We saw it only a month or two before he died, and that scene hit me – and, I imagine, him – as hard as film ever has.

59. This translation is accurate, but does not, perhaps, impart the full, simple power of her words. In Japanese, Nahoko says "*Anata, ikite. Ikite.*" "Ikite" is the verb 'to live,' conjugated in the basic command form. It could just as easily be translated as "*Darling, live. Live.*" While the subtitle translation conveys the significance of what she



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says to those unfamiliar with the language, it fails to convey the gentleness of her words. Rather than telling Jiro he *must* live, she is softly prompting him to do so, and in turn, telling him that it is okay to move on – a subtle but important distinction that makes a big difference to the emotional impact of the scene.



## Epilogue: *Always With Me*

### Applying the lessons of Hayao Miyazaki's creative reflection

*I don't consider myself to be creating films and manga about being hurt. Everyone has gone through that. It's a matter of whether a person holds on to it as a valuable experience or sublimates it in a different form. That wound can be endured, but it cannot be healed. Enduring it is sufficient, as this is the very core of human existence.*

Hayao Miyazaki, 1996<sup>1</sup>

When an artist as accomplished as Hayao Miyazaki begins to reflect on his own creative processes and philosophies, one sits up and takes notice, especially if one considers oneself to be a creative person, or is fascinated by the ways a force as ethereal and unknowable as art comes into this world. Such was the foundational idea behind this study – that if a master as talented and singular as Hayao Miyazaki is willing to teach, then we who are captivated with the mysteries of creativity should take the time to listen. The lessons he offers are many and varied, some universally known and others uniquely insightful, but they all point towards a unified, hopeful conception of making art and living life.

The first lesson – and probably the last as well, when dealing with Miyazaki – is of course the significance of fantasy in a creative person's life. Not as a means of escaping reality, but as a path towards transcending its boundaries. It is such a simple principle, when all is said and done – that an artist must envision whatever they wish to create within themselves before bringing it into the real world is hardly revolutionary – and yet the way Miyazaki illustrates this truth, either through vivid portraits of a person's interior life – like Shizuku's fantastic adventures in the world of Iblard, or Jiro's ability to overcome his physical limitations to soar high above the earth – or through exterior fantasy elements – Kiki's magic allows both her and the audience to see the world from an entirely new perspective – reveals the true scope of empowerment fantasy offers each of us. It is something all of Miyazaki's films, whether they focus on creative reflexivity or not, serve to remind us of through their brilliant and passionate animation. That such grand levels of transcendent imagination can exist within the hearts of human beings speaks to an inherent strength and grace within our souls. It is wonderful to create, because to dream is to be the best of mankind.

The connection between personality and creativity is a chief lesson of Miyazaki's artistry. Kiki, Shizuku, and Jiro's stories all teach us how creativity offers an avenue to express one's truest self – a gift in a world that represses and discourages individualism – and how creating art can, in turn, reveal layers of our identity we never knew existed. Think of how Shizuku expresses her feelings of repression in her song lyrics, long before they become conscious thoughts, or how Kiki displays her most valuable talents – those of kindness, empathy, and generosity – while believing she is only running delivery errands. To create is to tap into one's personality and experience, and to pour oneself into one's talents is to touch one's unconscious.

Then there are the lessons about how creativity broadens our horizons. For to be creative, a person must naturally revel in art, a multifaceted form of expression that can be manifested in all sorts of mediums – which in these films includes writing, painting, playing music, crafting instruments, restoring antiques, and designing airplanes – and thus offers the artistic type all kinds of opportunities to surrender oneself to wonder. Those who do it best, like Kiki, Shizuku, and Jiro, find amazement not only in art, but in the natural world as well. There are enough things to wonder at in this life that existence itself can cause marvel, and living with this sort of sustained, constant wonder in one's heart can only tap one in further to the spirit of creativity. By making films that explore this type of wonder, and are, in the many spectacular aesthetic sensations they provide, objects of wonder in and of themselves, Miyazaki teaches this notion with particular impact.

Expanding one's horizons also means living comfortably amongst others, and as Kiki, Shizuku, and Jiro all learn from the many friends and mentors they encounter, the strength of human bonds makes a creative spirit flourish. Relationships of all types are never easy. They can cause us anxiety, as they do for Kiki, and opening oneself up enough to let another person in is among the most vulnerable and challenging actions we take in daily life. But Kiki becomes better for it, and so does Shizuku – who would never have discovered the actualizing power of her creativity were it not for the motivation of Mr. Nishi and Seiji – and even Jiro, whose time with partner Nahoko was limited and caused sorrow, found inspiration in being marked by love. While creativity has a vast internal dimension, it also requires knowing and learning from others, and finding a place in the world where one can feel both comfortable and consistently curious, perhaps because this connection with exterior relationships and outward sensations expands one's own internal depths, giving one more to access when creating.

Youthful creativity may be the purest kind, as Miyazaki observes in these films. There is a forceful, unstoppable passion to the way Shizuku tackles her writing, or Kiki performs her deliveries, that is undeniably admirable. Taking their first steps towards artistic expression, all they have is years of bottled-up creative energy to release upon the world, and once they start, there is little, initially, to stop them. The challenges of creativity come later. The artistic block, the compromise, the responsibilities of adulthood – all those things that strain or limit our ability to create do not touch Kiki or Shizuku at first, and watching their energy surge so endlessly, one cannot help but long to tap into that same creative wellspring. Imagine if one could have that kind of youthful passion, coupled with the knowledge and experience of adulthood; perhaps the two are mutually exclusive, but it is a nice idea to consider. Part of how Jiro is characterized in *The Wind Rises* is his ability to balance these two impulses as best a person can, tackling each project with a youthful enthusiasm, even as he brings to bear an adult life's worth of experiences and inspirations on his designs. All three of these characters are creative 'role-models,' in one sense or another, and Jiro, as the most mature figure, arguably has the most to offer.

Of course, the most complex lesson of Miyazaki's creativity, and the one Jiro embodies, is the duality of art. Miyazaki explores this through a particularly extreme example in the story of the Zero Fighter, but the lesson is applicable in broader terms. For whether or not one's creativity will have a directly observable negative impact on the world, as it did for Jiro Horikoshi, and as Miyazaki often worries his own work does in furthering the commercial landscape, there will always and inevitably be a separation between the personal creation an artist gives life to, and the object that goes out into the world and is experienced and absorbed by others. It is a phenomenological distance a creative person must be prepared to encounter. Even something as simple as Shizuku becoming anxious over showing Mr. Nishi her story speaks to

this perception gap; the fear lies in wondering if the work will make sense to anyone else, or have power to a person other than the creator. There is no easy way to reconcile this problem. Even an issue as deeply existential as the nature of transience feeds this anxiety, for to release a creation onto the world is to acknowledge that it shall one day cease to exist; that the perfect, idealized dreams we hold in our hearts and minds shall fade away one way or another, either through our deaths, or the eventual decay of our art, or through the changes that art goes through once released upon the world. As Caproni said to Jiro, “Airplanes are beautiful dreams, cursed dreams...waiting for the sky to swallow them up.” The same could be said of all art, for all creative people live, on one level or another, within their own kingdom of cursed dreams.

Difficult as it can be to process, this is a lesson we must internalize and live with if we are to create; consciously considering all these lessons, in fact, allows us to see ourselves and the world clearer, our eyes becoming increasingly unclouded the more we understand creativity’s highs and lows. Or, put another way – the more one understands oneself, the clearer and more comprehensible the world seems, and visa versa. To see with eyes unclouded makes all parts of life more manageable and fulfilling, which is the truest and most broadly applicable part of these lessons. As *Kiki’s Delivery Service* teaches us through a protagonist who is not strictly ‘creative,’ one does not have to be an artist to encounter the same challenges and anxieties as those who create. Just as one must clear one’s vision to make great art, one must see through unclouded eyes to comfortably live and contribute within a community, and that involves the same steps as accessing a creative spirit – fostering human relationships, feeling comfort in one’s environment, taking wonder in the world around one, striving to assert one’s individuality, and, indeed, being able to explore one’s inner self through fantasy.

For one of the most powerful lessons in these films is the liberating power of creative thought. When Kiki flies high through the air overlooking Corico, or Shizuku performs “Country Roads” with her new friends at the antique shop, or Jiro imagines himself soaring through the sky while designing planes at his desk at work, each is freed from the constraints of their real lives, a freedom that, in turn, makes the challenges of the real world so much more manageable. In a sense, it is these moments, where the boundaries of existence are momentarily transcended, that make their lives worth living. This may be the most applicable lesson of Miyazaki’s creativity – that through creative processes, we can actualize ourselves and our most meaningful dreams, being who we want to be and doing the things we want to do in a world that is fraught with flaws, tensions, and repressions. Creativity operates on a personal level this way, and even those who do not make art can access these imaginative processes to make their lives more fulfilling.

But for all of us as people, as a collective society, there is a greater lesson embedded in here – that if we can employ our minds and passions to summon our individual identities into existence, then maybe we can do the same on a broader scale. Miyazaki’s films are bright and joyous and hopeful in so many ways, but they are also deeply touched by darkness, built upon the foundations of modern repressions, human aggressions, and natural tragedies that make this world a difficult place to live. Whether his films take place in fantasies or reality, whether they deal with creativity or not, our world is their setting on one level or another, and that setting is far from perfect.

Perhaps the greatest message of Miyazaki’s creativity, then – the reason he continually returns to creative reflection as a means of clarifying his thematic vision as a filmmaker – is that if we can apply these principles of creative thinking to the world, then maybe one day, things

will turn out all right. That if enough people share a determined passion and imagination, focusing hard on shedding the boundaries of what our world is, and instead conceiving of what it could be, then maybe human society could, as a whole, actualize this world into one we can take pride in, and live amidst comfortably. That if we all see the possibilities of life with eyes unclouded, then perhaps we can transcend our many limitations.

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On the morning of September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013, as Hayao Miyazaki prepared for the press conference at which he would formally announce his retirement, these thoughts seemed to weigh on his mind. As depicted in *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*, he waited in a small room adjacent to the conference space in a Tokyo hotel, along with several colleagues, and an assortment of hotel employees milling about. As director Mami Sunada films him from a short distance, Miyazaki stands alone at a window with red drapes, holding the curtain open to look out upon the city. He notices her, and gestures for the documentarian to come join him. He holds the curtain for her camera to see outside. “See him watering his plants?” he asks her, gazing at a man on an opposing rooftop with hose in hand. “I see him,” she replies. “He has no idea we’re watching him,” Miyazaki muses. With a soft but joyful curiosity in his voice, an eager sense of possibility that intensifies with each passing word, he continues:

*Look over there. See that house with all the ivy on it? From that rooftop, what if you leapt onto the next rooftop, dashed over to that blue and green wall, jumped up and climbed up the pipe, ran across the roof and jumped onto the next? You can, in animation. If you can walk on the cable, you could see the other side. When you look from above, so many things reveal themselves to you. Maybe race along the concrete wall. Suddenly, there in your humdrum town is a magical movie. Isn't it fun to see things that way? Feels like you could go somewhere far beyond.*

*Maybe you can.*



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<sup>1</sup> Hayao Miyazaki, “What is Most Important for Children,” in *Turning Point: 1997 – 2008*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederick L. Schodt (San Francisco: Viz Media, 2014), 168.

**Dedicated to Hayao Miyazaki, and all the wondrous worlds he has shown me;  
And to my father, David Lack, a most eager companion on all our journeys through them.**

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